

Short session preview

BY BRIANNA KRAEMER

While it's not expected to be a major policy-heavy legislative session for the North Carolina General Assembly, key legislative priorities remain under consideration.

The General Assembly's short session officially begins on April 24. With high-stake elections at the center of the 2024 political stage, state legislators are prepared for a somewhat uneventful session because short sessions in the North Carolina General Assembly permit only minimal legislative action.

The parameters of the short session are specifically tailored to keep the flow of legislative business down, restricting actions mostly to budget-related adjustments. However, crossover bills can make the cut even if they don't fall under appropriations or finance.

Crossover bills allow legislation from the previous year to be considered during the subsequent short session. More than 250 bills are considered eligible during the 2024 short session, meaning they passed one chamber in 2023 and are eligible un-

der the specific prerequisites. But eligibility doesn't guarantee progression.

Potential legislative actions

The primary focus of the short session is on the state budget and any issues that could affect it. As fiscal policy analysts at the John Locke Foundation pointed out, the state's \$30 billion 2023-2024 budget only tells part of the story. There's more than \$7 billion in other allocations set up as reserves for future use.

House Majority Leader John Bell, R-Wayne, told the Carolina Journal that flood-mitigation efforts and funding is an area that he'll be keeping a close eye on. The NC Flood Resilience Blueprint seeks to reduce flooding impacts in North

Carolina. In 2021, the General Assembly appropriated \$20 million to the Department of Environmental Quality, but the agency has only spent \$1.9 million to develop flood-mitigation strategies for the Neuse River basin.

Bell, as a member of the House Committee on Disaster Recovery and Homeland Security, has seen firsthand how flooding impacts the state.

"I'll be making sure that funding is appropriately spent and if there are any types of bureaucratic red tape or any type of regulations that need to be handled to move that forward in a very expedited manner," Bell explained.

Of the state's \$30 billion budget, nearly \$2 billion was allocated to over 200 individual water and sewer-related projects, another key area for Bell.

With record-breaking demand for North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship Program, increased funding is a potential budget modification. Lawmakers appropriated \$177 million

for the program's reserve fund for the 2023-24 school year. Nearly 72,000 applications were received for the expanded Opportunity Scholarship Program by the close of the priority application window on March 1.

On the House side, legislators confirmed they are discussing the possibility of increasing funds. On the Senate side, officials remain open to discussing potential funding changes.

"The surge in Opportunity Scholarship applications is the latest sign that North Carolina families value having choice in education," said Lauren Horsch, spokesperson for Senate Leader Phil Berger. "Just like any other budget item, legislators will discuss potential funding changes as they make budget revisions during the short session."

If an item doesn't fall under appropriate

actions or finance, it could still be considered if it cleared one chamber in 2023 and was eligible for crossover. The House passed significantly more legislation in 2023 that awaits action by the Senate, including an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) bill, House Bill 10. The legislation passed the House last March and would mandate all sheriffs cooperate with ICE. The latest polling data shows immigration is the No. 1 issue for North Carolinians.

Signs are strong that HB 10 will see action in the coming months on the Senate side, as Berger's office confirms he is in favor of taking up the legislation surrounding illegal immigration and ICE.

ICE legislation was held up by the Senate last year in hopes of pushing the House to pass Senate Bill 3, legislation surrounding medical marijuana. The NC Compassionate Care Act would legalize medical marijuana in the state in limited cases and with limited approved distributors, but it did not clear the House. It remains viable in the 2024 session.

In addition, legislators could

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NCGA allocates billions to opaque 'reserve funds'

BY KATHERINE ZEHNDER

The 2024-25 state budget includes approximately \$7 billion in spending beyond the \$30 billion headline number being reported.

The General Fund appropriations total \$29.787 billion. However, there is an additional \$7.2 billion in planned expenditures that are being kept "off-budget" and are allocated to "reserve funds."

Reserve funds are not new, and, to an extent, allocating money in reserve funds is standard procedure when it comes to the budget. However, since 2020 the practice has grown, with an increase in the use and number of reserve funds during the budgeting process.

"Every year, a certain amount of available funds are set aside into special 'reserve' funds," reads a report from the John

Locke Foundation, released last fall. "Traditionally, the set-asides were limited to contributions into the state's Savings Reserve Fund and reserved for repairs and renovations."

The \$30 billion reported as the total budget is only the General Fund, while total spending is significantly more.

"The General Assembly actually set aside about \$37 billion, but that \$7 billion in alloca-

tions above the reported \$30 billion is in the form of budgetary 'reserves' being set aside from state revenue," states Joe Warrta in a recent analysis for Locke. "Essentially, the state is allocating that \$7 billion to special accounts set up as reserves for future use, but significant portions of it are allocated right away."

The Rainy Day Fund currently contains around \$4.75 billion, well above what the Office of the State

Budget and Management (OSBM) and the nonpartisan Fiscal Research Division of the NC General Assembly determined was sufficient savings for the state to withstand a financial downturn.

The Rainy Day Fund is a reserve fund, as well, but the increase in these reserve funding buckets was the focus of the JLF report. Since 2020, at least 20

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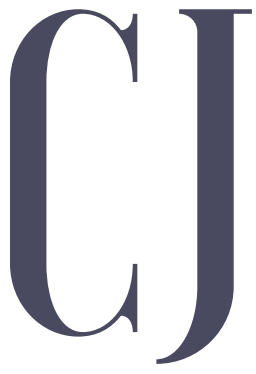
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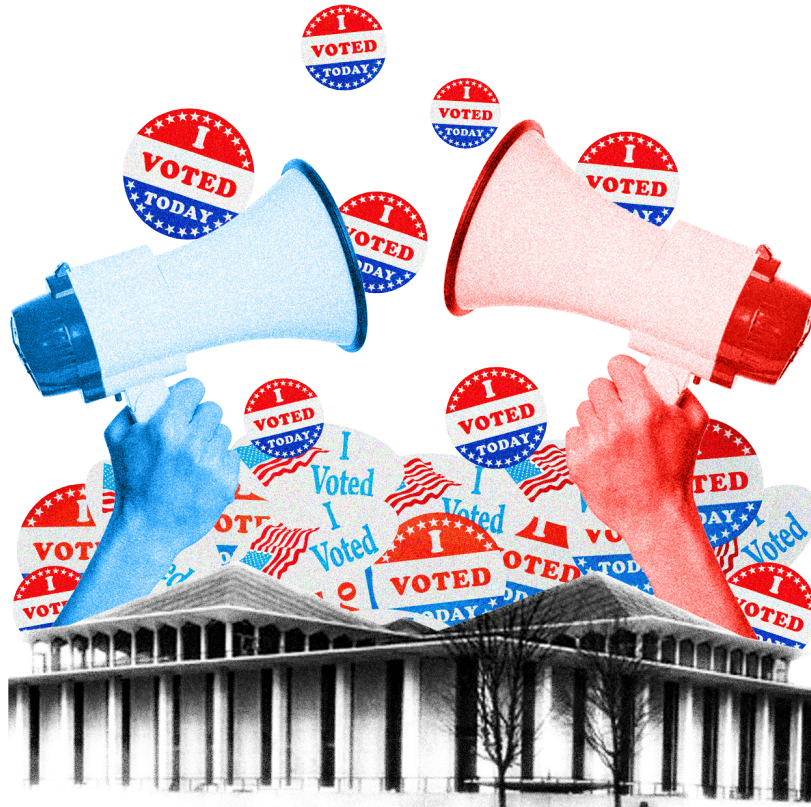
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Tribalism is bad for NC politics and policy

DONNA KING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Following the March primary, three North Carolina counties rejected election protests from House incumbent Michael Wray, D-Northampton, who cited irregularities in the primary election, ones he says could have changed the outcome. Wray was defeated by progressive primary challenger Rodney Pierce by just 35 votes, or three tenths of a percent (0.3%). On March 25, Wray announced that he would end his appeal for a recount despite the razor-thin loss. However, there is a lot more to that story as moderates, like Wray, swim upstream in their own parties.

Wray is not unfamiliar with the political battlefield, but this time some of his partisan teammates have become his adversaries. Fellow Democrats and groups from the left wing of their party, like Carolina Forward, targeted Wray in the primary for occasionally voting with Republicans. While certainly not conservatives, he and Rep. Cecil Brockman, D-Guilford, did vote with the Republican majority on issues like charter schools, the state budget, and banning gender-transition surgeries for minors.

Their willingness to reach across the aisle drew support from Carolina Leadership Coalition, a political action committee that counts Republicans among its leadership. The group sent out mailers in Wray and Brockman's districts praising their impact for their communities. Democrats and some in the media counted this support as Republican "dark money meddling" in the primary election.

However, is it "meddling" for a PAC to support a candidate with whom they find areas of agreement? I argue that this should actually happen more often.

Political tribalism is destructive not just for society but for

the policymaking process. There was a time when elected officials were tolerated, even encouraged, to vote their conscience and their constituency, not just their party.

Don't get me wrong; meddling does happen. Our own Gov. Roy Cooper, as chair of the Democratic Governors Association, did just that in 2022. The DGA spent millions of dollars on ads to support Trump-endorsed candidates in the primary who they thought could not win the general election, using their considerable assets to put a thumb on the scale of state-level Republican primaries across the country.

The difference here is that the Carolina Leadership Coalition is supporting candidates with whom they find some, albeit limited, policy areas on which they agree. That is not meddling; it is consensus-building.

Wray and Brockman appear less worried less about their political label and more about the policy they are passing for North Carolina. Tribalistic objections to that philosophy are why people mistrust government and politicians. If an organization finds itself in the power seat where their donations can impact policy, they should be focused on finding those candidates with whom they share a policy goal, regardless of party.

Parties, meantime, should take note of what we see unfolding in these primary races. It is not a good look. Just ask Kirk deViere or Elmer Floyd. Both represented Cumberland County at different times and found themselves at the receiving end of well-funded primary opponents. Cooper actively campaigned against them because, at times, they voted the values of their constituents and not just their party.

Parties should keep their tent large enough and flexible enough to allow members to represent their communities. If they do not, voters will do it for them. Unaffiliated voters are the largest group of voters in North Carolina, outpacing both major parties, and will hold the deciding vote in 2024.

Short and sweet: My wish for legislative session

DONALD BRYSON
PUBLISHER



As the pinks, purples, and whites of blooming dogwood trees paint the landscape and a blanket of yellow pine pollen settles over everything, signaling the unmistakable arrival of springtime in North Carolina, another significant event is near — the "short session" of the state General Assembly. Yet, amidst the seasonal renewal, there is a healthy skepticism, questioning whether this biennial legislative rendezvous will stay true to its name and be short.

There are definitely important matters to discuss in the short session. From flood mitigation to funding for the state's Opportunity Scholarship Program to the unfortunate and ugly issue of antisemitism, legislators have work to do.

However, as lawmakers assemble for what's meant to be a brisk affair, I have doubts it will achieve that aim, due to the propensity to let the session drag on well into the summer or even fall. While billed as a brief interlude for urgent matters, there's a wary eye cast on whether efficiency will prevail or if the allure of prolonged debate will hijack the session's brevity, casting a shadow over the efficacy of governance.

Anyone who spends time down on Jones Street in Raleigh will hear the terms "long session" and "short session" ad nauseam. These terms refer to the regular legislative sessions of the General Assembly. The "long session" occurs biennially in each odd-numbered year. It typically begins in January. It

is the primary legislative session during which the General Assembly conducts its most significant business, including crafting and passing the state budget and addressing major policy issues.

The "short session," on the other hand, is convened in the following even-numbered year and is typically shorter in duration, commencing in late April or early May. The traditional goal for both types of sessions is to end shortly after the end of the state's fiscal year, on June 30. However, that has rarely happened in the past several years, including 2023, when the adjournment resolution passed on Oct. 25, three months and 25 days into the new fiscal year.

Article II, Section 11 of the North Carolina Constitution outlines the General Assembly's session schedule. It mandates regular sessions to convene biennially, beginning in 1973 and continuing every two years after that, on a date specified by law. Additionally, the section allows for extra sessions to be called by the joint proclamation of the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives.

Thus, while the "long session" is constitutionally mandated and serves as the cornerstone of the legislative calendar, the "short session" is not; instead, it is a procedural creation of the General Assembly itself. The short session allows lawmakers to reconvene to address any remaining legislative matters, make budget adjustments, and respond to emergent issues, providing a mechanism for ongoing governance between the "long" sessions.

There are no constitutional or statutory limits to the length

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NCInnovation board member calls for state audit

BY JEFF MOORE

At a Feb. 14 board meeting, directors of NCInnovation (NCI), the private nonprofit written into the biennial state budget last fall to the tune of \$500 million in taxpayer funds, labored over the interpretation of financial statements and statutory definitions. At issue was whether or not NCI is adhering to the law requiring the entity to use Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP), especially with respect to private donations and pledges.

The questions were raised by board member Art Pope. Pope is the owner and chairman of Variety Wholesalers Inc, which owns and operates a chain of discount retail stores spanning 17 states. He's also a founding board member of the John Locke Foundation, which publishes Carolina Journal; and is chairman of the John William Pope Foundation, a family grant-making organization he has led since its creation in 1986. He was also a member of the North Carolina General Assembly and served as the state budget director from 2013-14.

The answers provided by NCI executives did not appear sufficient to allay his concerns. Documents obtained by Carolina Journal via a public records request show, before the board meeting was even over, Pope filed a request for an official audit of NCI with the North Carolina state auditor.

"Respectfully, I do not believe that as of December 7, 2023 NCInnovation was managing its records, accounts and financial reporting in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles ('GAAP')," writes Pope in his request for an official audit.

He concludes, "I cannot say with certainty whether NCInnovation is GAAP compliant as of today because the management of NCInnovation has de-

nied most all my requests for documents and refused to answer most of my questions in regard to NCInnovation's accounting, despite the fact that I am a member of the NCInnovation Board of Directors appointed by the [North Carolina] House of Representatives."

Noncompliant accounting concerns

As the letter to the state auditor indicates, and records confirm, concerns over possible noncompliant accounting at NCI have been ongoing for months. Upon appointment to the board in the fall of 2023, directors made initial inquiries related to accounting and capital positions within the context of statutory requirements. The enabling legislation, the state budget, requires NCI to raise a certain amount of private capital, among other stipulations, to qualify for the first and second tranches of taxpayer funds, each a whopping \$250 million.

In December 2023, email exchanges show Pope inquiring with executives about the integrity of NCI accounting practices and requesting meetings with the third-party accounting firms retained by NCI in order to go over the books.

"It is evident that NCInnovation does not have a procedure in place to document, review and determine if a commitment should be recorded as income in accordance with GAAP, including FASB Accounting Standards No. 116 in particular," writes Pope in a Dec. 21 email to NCI executives in which he lists a series of questions regarding accounting compliance.

Records show that just one day before that word of caution, the general counsel for the North Carolina Department of Commerce emailed NCI executives with her own note of caution regarding the certification

required for the first check of \$250 million to be delivered:

"GovOps has flagged a question we need to resolve before we can provide the check to NCInnovation," writes the general counsel for NC Department of Commerce on Dec. 20, 2023. "GovOps reached out today regarding DOC's certification, and specifically whether or not DOC had verified NCInnovation's compliance with general accepted accounting principles (GAAP) through prior years financials in order to determine compliance with the specific provision 143-728(d)(9). We've explained that we hadn't done so."

Later that afternoon, NCI CEO Bennet Waters responds that they "have moved NCInnovation's books and records in-house, and we are maintaining those books and records in compliance with GAAP in accordance with 143-728(d)(9)."

A few weeks later, Pope reiterated his questions upon receiving notice of a special meeting originally scheduled for Jan. 18, 2024. The meeting was to include an update on the accounting review from a third-party accounting firm. Though he received a response from the board chairman, it did not include answers to the accounting mysteries raised by Pope.

'I regret that I was correct'

"Thank you for acknowledging my requests," wrote Pope in an email dated Jan. 11, 2024. "I regret that I was correct, in that you are limiting the information that will be made available to what you choose to put in the Board Effects material, and that I am not to be given an opportunity to talk to Kristen Hoyle, the accountant at Thomas, Judy and Tucker. At this point we will respectfully disagree on the role of individual members of the Board of Directors and the

authority of the Chairman of the Board to limit the corporate information, including accounting records and financial information, that will be made available to Board members in preparation for an agenda item for the noticed Board meeting, and in general."



"The management of NCInnovation has denied most all my requests for documents and refused to answer most of my questions in regard to NCInnovation's accounting."

-Art Pope Feb. 14 letter to state auditor

The special board meeting called for Jan. 18 was subsequently canceled. A week later, the certification question presumably resolved, NCI receives a wire transfer of \$250 million in taxpayer funds. The draft timeline of financial and accounting milestones ends with a note lamenting that NCI was "unable to accrue what would have been more than \$1.33 million in 'investment income' during the 37 days that transpired between 18 December (when Commerce indicated a check would be ready for pick-up) and 25 January (when the funds were wired. Interest accrued in that period remained with the State and is unrecoverable by NCI."

Formal request for audit

At the aforementioned board meeting on Feb. 14, the accounting compliance issues were again raised, and Pope officially requested an audit to determine compliance with state law.

The documents and underlying uncertainty regarding com-

pliance may lend further credence to a recent warning from Brian Balfour, senior vice president of research at the John Locke Foundation.

In a blog post entitled, "Time to Pump the Brakes on This Unproven Experiment?" Balfour writes, "With no proof of concept nor a single example of a successful research grant to point to, perhaps the legislature was too hasty in awarding NCInnovation \$500 million. The group already received \$250 million in last year's budget and is slated to receive the second \$250 million in the new fiscal year that starts July 1. It's not too late to redirect that second \$250 million elsewhere and allow NCInnovation to demonstrate its worth before receiving any more taxpayer dollars."

Moreover, the timeline of key NCI activities also raises questions about the actions of bureaucrats and legislators after the initial flagging of "GAAP compliance" issues. After Commerce alerted NCI that the NC House had objections to certification, the NC Senate purportedly "disputed the House interpretation... and conveyed that to Commerce." A week later, House senior staff allegedly called Commerce to remove their objection to releasing the \$250 million in taxpayer funding, initiating the wire process.

Yet, NCI only had a cursory third-party accounting review (not an audit), in addition to the given word of their CEO, that they were in compliance with the law before receiving hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. Removing all doubt about whether NCI is compliant with the law giving them this taxpayer money may indeed require a full audit. In the meantime, Balfour suggests, it may be time to pump the brakes on distributing any additional taxpayer funds to an already well-endowed nonprofit raising transparency and accounting alarms.

Short session preview

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address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) during the session.

During a committee meeting of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees, Jim Blaine, former

chief of staff to Berger, indicated that North Carolina could soon follow Florida's lead on DEI at public universities. Inside sources confirmed to the Carolina Journal that the General Assembly is currently discussing possible action on DEI legislation.

If the General Assembly institutes DEI regulations, public universities would likely lose funding for administrative offices that advance DEI ideas. Ac-

cording to reports from the Martin Center for Academic Renewal, DEI has become a part of the strategic plans of all 16 schools that make up the UNC System. DEI staff salaries total over \$11 million throughout the UNC System, with UNC-Chapel Hill employing 35 DEI staff members. Topping DEI employment at schools across the state is North Carolina State University, with 36 DEI administrators.

Action could also be tak-

en on hot-button topics such as casinos, which didn't make it through the House last year. Senate leadership intends to bring casinos back up in a later session for more discussion.

The 2024 short session will be House Speaker Tim Moore's last session, as he runs for a seat in the US Congress. When the leader of the chamber is running for a higher office, it has an effect on the entire chamber.

"I think the consensus that

everybody seems to have is they want a very short session with the speaker running for Congress and a lot of contested races," Bell said. "On the other end, you've got a lot of people that are not coming back, and so there will be a lot of new faces coming into the General Assembly. So I think a lot of people want to go and finish out the year strong."

Opaque 'reserve funds'

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new reserve funds have been created. Prior to 2020, there were only a few.

"Perhaps most troubling of all, is the speed with which this has become a practice for the General Assembly," wrote Warta. "For FY 2023-24, there are fourteen different budget reservations totaling \$7.2 billion. For FY 2021-22, there were eleven reservations to-

taling \$6.3 billion. For FY 2018-19, there were only two reserves totaling just under \$300 million: the Savings Reserve and the Medicaid Transformation Reserve. This has been a rapidly changing — and largely unprecedented — budgeting procedure. Indeed, as recently as a handful of years ago it was common practice for contributions to special 'reserve' funds to be included in the General Fund appropriations."

One of the primary concerns with the proliferation of reserve funds is the lack of transparency on how these funds are being spent. Reserve funds must be appropriated before they are spent,

and the General Assembly must pass legislation to appropriate funds. Details on how the funds are appropriated are found in either the committee report or the text of the bill. Some reserves have funds placed in them but not as outgoing appropriations. In these instances, the reserve funds would be seen in either the availability statement of the committee report or in a provision within the bill.

"Perhaps my biggest concern is the recent trend of setting billions aside into newly created special reserve funds, keeping that spending 'off-budget,' meaning it isn't included in the

General Fund spending totals," said Brian Balfour, vice president of research at the John Locke Foundation. "This artificially lowers the General Fund spending total that the public is informed about, misleading them about the growth of state spending."

While some reserve funds would strike the public as appropriate government functions (the Clean Water Reserve, for instance), others' relation to core government functions are a bit less clear. One candidate is the World University Games Reserve, aimed at supporting the semi-annual sports competition

in North Carolina, according to Balfour. North Carolina has been awarded to host the games in 2029, so the reserve has started to set aside taxpayer funds to subsidize the event when the time comes.

The General Assembly holds its short session this spring, focused on budget modifications that could mean big changes in funding levels for everything from Opportunity Scholarships, to NCInnovation, or even the World University Games Reserve Fund. Much of the taxpayer money being spent though, may not be spelled out clearly in the budget.

4 ELECTIONS

NC's May 14 runoffs feature 3 major contests

BY KATHERINE ZEHNDER

Following the North Carolina Republican primary election earlier this month, the races for state auditor, lieutenant governor, and North Carolina's 13th Congressional District (NC-13) are going into runoff elections.

In each race, neither of the top two candidates reached the 30% threshold to avoid a runoff. In the race for lieutenant governor, Hal Weatherman will face off against Jim O'Neill; in the auditor's race, Dave Boliek will face off against Jack Clark; and in NC-13, Kelly Daughtry will face off against Brad Knott.

The Sixth Congressional District was also headed to a runoff between former Congressman Mark Walker and Trump-endorsed Addison McDowell. However, Walker declined a runoff and instead accepted a position with Donald Trump's campaign for president as outreach director for faith and minority communities.

"All voters who live in the district for which a second primary is conducted and are registered with the political party of the candidates are eligible to vote in the second primary," according to the State Board of Elections website. "Unaffiliated voters who live in that district and either didn't vote in the primary, or who voted the ballot of the party for which the second primary is being held, would also be eligible."

Lieutenant governor

Weatherman, a candidate for lieutenant governor, was campaign manager and chief of staff for former Lt. Gov. Dan Forest as well as campaign manager for former US Rep. Sue Myrick. Weatherman also founded a charter school.

"We are well positioned for the May 14 runoff election for Lt. Governor," Weatherman told the Carolina Journal in an email. "On the primary election night, we garnered 181,000 votes statewide, carrying 62 counties and besting the second place finisher by 34,000 votes. Our campaign is a testament to the power of grassroots. I traveled to all 100 counties (the only candidate to do so), including visiting 35 counties [five] times or more and 10 counties, 10 times or more. On election night, when you take out all the candidates eliminated and match us vs. our runoff opponent, we outperformed him in 80 counties. We have not let our foot off the gas and instead have doubled our efforts to travel the state and recruit volunteers and will settle for nothing but all out victory in the runoff election. Runoffs are won with boots on the ground and I have spent 14 straight months recruiting people in all 100 counties. We will now mobilize them and use the runoff election to 'prime the pump' for an energetic, grassroots-oriented general election run."

Weatherman's opponent, Jim

O'Neill, is serving his fourth term as district attorney for Forsyth County, previously serving as assistant DA. In 2020, he ran against Attorney General Josh Stein, now the Democratic nominee for governor. O'Neill's campaign did not respond to the Carolina Journal's request for comment.

The runoff winner will face state Sen. Rachel Hunt, the Democratic nominee. The general election winner in November will replace sitting Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, who is running for governor.

State auditor

Republican candidate Jack Clark received 23% of the vote in the auditor's race primary, while Dave Boliek received 22%. The winner of the auditor's runoff will face incumbent Democrat Jessica Holmes in the general election. Holmes was appointed when former State Auditor Beth Wood, a Democrat, resigned, following a controversial car accident. The general election will feature libertarian candidate, Bob Drach, as well.

"My campaign strategy for the runoffs is similar to my campaign strategy prior to March 5," Clark told the Carolina Journal in an email. "While I do want the primary season to be over so that I can focus on the general election, I am fully invested in the upcoming election in May."

Boliek called for an emergency audit of Durham schools back in February, with a press release stating, "If elected as State Audi-

tor, Boliek said he will establish rapid-response teams to tackle financial and programmatic emergencies like Durham's. Such crises require independent external audits, not mere internal reviews as in Durham's case."

This followed an incident with Durham Public Schools when a payroll error resulted in employees being overpaid from July to December of 2023, as previously reported by the Carolina Journal.

"I am continuing to campaign across North Carolina, meeting with voters and laying out a vision for the State Auditor's office," Boliek told the Carolina Journal in an email.

NC-13

In NC-13, Daughtry faces off against Knott. The runoff winner will face Democratic nominee Frank Pierce in the general election.

"Kelly won the primary election by nearly double digits because conservatives want a fighter who will stand with President Trump to end the invasion on our border," Stefan Mychajliw, spokesman for the Daughtry campaign, told the Carolina Journal in an email. "Conservatives have a simple choice in the runoff: stand with Kelly Daughtry, the America First conservative, or Never Trumper and Biden DOJ hack Brad Knott who will do in Congress what he's done for the last 8 years — pick Joe Biden over President Trump. That choice couldn't be more clear and that's why we look forward to a strong

victory on May 14."

Daughtry's opponent, Knott, is a former federal prosecutor.

"The 13th district primary was a hot mess of a long list of good candidates splitting the Conservative vote," Jonathan Felts, campaign adviser to Knott, told the Carolina Journal in an email. "This is no longer the case. Now it's a one-on-one contest with a very clear contrast for Republican voters to consider. Brad Knott is a Conservative Fighter who spent the Trump Administration prosecuting and locking up illegal aliens, drug dealers, and hardened criminals. Kelly Daughtry is a lifelong RINO who publicly bragged to her friends about voting for Barack Obama and more recently donated money to Democrat Cheri Beasley for US Senate just over a week after President Trump had endorsed Ted Budd! We feel very optimistic that Trump Conservatives who dominate a primary runoff will support conservative prosecutor Brad Knott over squishy divorce lawyer Kelly Daughtry on May 14."

Former President Donald Trump and the well-funded conservative group Americans for Prosperity have both since endorsed Knott in the race.

The runoff election will take place on May 14, while in-person early voting for the runoff begins on April 25, ending on May 11. The deadline to request an absentee ballot is May 7 at 5 pm, with a ballot-return deadline of 7:30 pm on Election Day.

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NCSBE certifies 2024 primary, gets ready for May 14 runoff

BY THERESA OPEKA

On March 26, the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) certified the March 5 primary during a board meeting.

More than 1.8 million ballots were cast, or 24% of the over 7.4 million registered voters. That's down from the 2020 primary when over 2.1 million ballots were cast, 31% of the over 6.9 million voters that were registered then.

This was also the second time North Carolina was a Super Tuesday state.

NCSBE executive director Karen Brinson Bell said that since the 2020 election, the number of registered voters who are affiliated with the Democratic Party has gone down while the number of Republican and unaffiliated registered voters has gone up, with the most notable jump for unaffiliated.



IMAGE OF VOTERS IS CREATIVE COMMONS VIA FLICKR USER COLUMBIA CITY BLOG.

The totals are as follows:

2020:

- Democrat — 2,525,133, 36%.
- Republican — 2,076,904, 30%.
- Unaffiliated — 2,295,327, 33%.
- Libertarian — 40,187, 0.58%.
- Constitutional — 3,099, 0.04%.
- Green — 2,086, 0.03%.

2024:

- Democrat — 2,415,077, 32%.
- Republican — 2,241,156, 30%.
- Unaffiliated — 2,751,776, 37%.
- Libertarian — 50,326, 0.67%.
- Green — 2,062, 0.03%.
- No Labels — 7,752, 0.10%.

She said there was a slight uptick in the number of people who chose to vote by absentee mail this year, 27,872 compared to 26,514 in 2020. But early voting was down, as was overall turnout. Over 671,000 voted in person for early voting compared to 779,254 in 2020.

Report: Nearly half a million illegal immigrants reside in NC

BY THERESA OPEKA

The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) studies the impact of illegal immigration on the United States and reports a costly impact from millions of illegal immigrants coming into the country since President Joe Biden took office. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has admitted that 85% of the migrants being encountered at the southern border are being released into the country.

FAIR's June 2023 estimate shows that, currently, 16.8 million illegal immigrants live in the US. The 2023 cost study shows that 488,000 live in the Tar Heel state, along with their 169,000 US-born children.

Most come from Mexico, followed by Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and India, according to Migrationpolicy.org.

The costs to support them are staggering. According to FAIR, in 2023, illegal immigration cost North Carolina taxpayers \$3.14 billion. That's \$779 per household annually, using the Census Bureau's number of households.

Also:

- **Illegal immigrant households added 122,218 students to local schools.**
- **The average cost to North Carolinians is \$4,781 per illegal alien.**
- **Taxpayers are supporting education costs of \$1.47 billion, police, legal, and corrections costs of \$461.1 million, as well as healthcare, public assistance, and general government services expenses.**



The US side of a border wall between the United States and Mexico in Douglas, a city on the Mexican border in southeastern Arizona.

According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) annual report, nearly half of the 170,590 illegal immigrants arrested in the US in 2023 had multiple criminal charges and convictions.

While enforcement arrests nearly doubled, including dozens of known or suspected terrorists, untold numbers of illegal immigrants are deemed "got-aways" who disappear into the nation's interior.

Nationwide, the criminal aliens averaged four charges and convictions each, including over 33,200 charges or convictions for assault, 7,520 for weapons offenses, over 1,700 for homicide-related crimes, and over 1,600 for kidnapping. Removals also included 3,406 known or suspected gang members; 139 known or suspected terrorists; seven human rights violators; and 108 foreign fugitives wanted by their countries for crimes including homicide, rape, terrorism, and kidnapping.

When it comes to safety, North Carolinians are also paying the price, financially and, for some, with their lives.

Drug trafficking in North Carolina

The state has seen a surge in all types of crimes, but those with the most notoriety are human/sex

trafficking and illegal drugs, most notably fentanyl.

Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page was elected president of the North Carolina Sheriffs Association in 2010. Since then, he has made several trips to the Arizona-Mexico border, working with the Federation for American Immigration Reform and Center for Immigration Studies. There he saw firsthand how the drug-trafficking routes work.

He told Carolina Journal that drug overdoses, especially from fentanyl, have seen an uptick in the past five years and that the drugs are coming from the Mexican drug cartels, with members being arrested just north of

his county and in Charlotte a few years ago.

"We need to get a handle on our border and to start focusing on the cartels and try to dismantle their operations like we did in Colombia back in the '80s and '90s," he told CJ. "These guys are going to continue to be strong, and if they can't move drugs, they move people. They're involved in human trafficking, drug smuggling, and human smuggling."

In 2023, more than 100,000 people died from fentanyl overdoses in the US, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Over the past nine years, more than 13,000 North Carolinians have died from overdosing on the drug.

In January 2024, there were 332 fentanyl deaths in the state, a slight drop from 368 deaths in January 2023.

Recently, Operation Thunder on the Hill in Nash County resulted in three arrests and seizure of 419 fentanyl pills, 68 grams of crack cocaine, and 490 grams of powder cocaine. The haul was likely headed to campuses and communities across the state. Investigators tracked this drug trafficking ring along Interstate-95 in Rocky Mount for nearly two years.

In December, 14 members of a drug organization with ties to the Sinaloa and CJNG Mexican cartels were sentenced to years in prison. They trafficked 328 kilograms of cocaine, 26 kilograms of fentanyl, and a kilogram of heroin in the Charlotte area between 2017 and 2022.

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Lawmakers probe 'Carbon Plan' as Duke Energy eyes new power-generation plants

BY BRIANNA KRAEMER

The Joint Legislative Committee on Energy Policy convened in March to evaluate the progress of the Carbon Plan required by the General Assembly in 2021 to work toward a carbon-neutral future for North Carolina utilities.

Passed into law three years ago by a Republican-controlled state legislature, General Statute 62-110.9 requires public utilities in North Carolina to achieve a 70% reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide by 2030. By 2050, utilities are expected to be carbon neutral.

"Policy, as we all know, is followed by implementation," said committee co-chair Sen. Paul Newton, R-Cabarrus, during the meeting. "And good policy can only be successful with faithful implementation of it. So part of the purpose of today is to remind everybody that the legislature cares a lot about how House Bill 951 is implemented. We're not going to pass this bill and go

away into the night."

Newton served as state president of Duke Energy from 2013 to 2015.

During the meeting, experts from the North Carolina Utilities Commission highlighted the requirements of the Carbon Plan and outlined the many energy resources available. Current state law binds the Utilities Commission to the least-cost and most reliable path toward zero emissions.

Duke Energy filed its carbon plan in August 2023 but recalculated its load forecast in January 2024 due to increased economic development in North Carolina. High growth in North Carolina will lead to more demand than initially projected, said Duke Energy, spurring new load forecasts and the filing of a supplemental carbon reduction plan. The new plan calls for hundreds of megawatts of wind energy.

"The selection of any particular type of generation — solar, wind, gas, nuclear, or any new innovative types of energy gener-

ation — must compete on a level playing field with two important boundaries," added Newton, alluding to cost and reliability factors. "Because without reliability, we don't have anything. The idea here is that the cost of carbon reduction cannot be built on the backs of the poor, nor can it degrade grid reliability."

In a new report authored by Northwood University in conjunction with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, experts "graded the grid" and concluded wind and solar to be the worst energy-generation options. Both were given an F based on their ability to meet the growing demand for affordable, reliable, and clean electric generation. The analysis determined natural gas to be the best option with an A, followed by nuclear with a B+.

Proponents market wind energy as able to reduce carbon emissions, protect the environment, reduce electric rates, and improve grid reliability. However, the analysis states there are numerous other grid reliability,

environmental, economic, and social costs associated with its use that are often overlooked.

"Given that society increasingly relies on a steady and reliable supply of affordable energy, government policies that mandate and heavily subsidize a transition to wind generation represent a growing threat to human health and well-being," the analysis states.

TotalEnergies and Cinergy, which is owned by Duke Energy, lease wind energy areas 22 miles off the coast of Wilmington from the US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. Incentivizing the project are federal tax credits allocated to clean energy projects in the Inflation Reduction Act, and construction on the lease parcels must begin soon to maximize those federal credits. If they meet all government conditions, the companies could receive a 50% return on the value of the offshore wind farms. Since 2016 wind power has received nearly 20 times more federal subsidies per unit of power

generated than nuclear, and solar has received nearly 100 times more than nuclear.

Duke Energy recently filed an application to construct a new natural gas power plant in Catawba County beginning in 2026, sticking to a reliable energy source as demand growth accelerates and green energy options fall short. If approved, the proposed plant would open in 2029 and replace the current Marshall Steam Station, one of its largest facilities that runs off both coal and natural gas. The new plant would contain two units with a total capacity of 850 megawatts.

Critics have said the plan indicates continued reliance on fossil fuels, while experts note that natural gas emits far fewer emissions than coal. Natural gas became price-competitive with coal in the 2000s and is widely considered the "bridge fuel" between coal and zero-emissions

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6 STATE BUDGET

Welfare reform discussion touches on 'One Door' policy and 'benefits cliffs'

BY DAVID BASS

North Carolina lawmakers heard from experts on the so-called "One Door" welfare-reform policy implemented by Utah, which advocates say helped to streamline the system and get more welfare recipients back into the labor force.

North Carolina has 300,000 open jobs while around 1.4 million individuals are on food stamps — known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP — and around 2.5 million are on Medicaid.

Advocates of One Door argue that the current social safety net is challenging to navigate and keeps recipients stuck in generational poverty. Recipients choose to work less or shy away from marriage in order to avoid losing benefits, resulting in high rates of single-parent households.

"When people don't work, their physical health declines, their psychological well-being declines," Leslie Ford, an adjunct fellow at the American Enterprise Institute's Center on Opportunity and Social Mobility, told a legislative oversight committee. "But when they move from welfare to work, we see financial strain declines, food insecurity drops. We see their physical, emotional, and psychological health improves. And we even see better health and education outcomes for their children."

Utah's story

The Beehive State created the original One Door policy in

1997. That state's reforms consolidated 23 welfare programs across six agencies into one department and fully integrated the social safety net into workforce development programs.

This created a stronger link between the net that catches individuals and the system that puts them back on their feet toward a more prosperous future, supporters say.

"[In Utah], when you come in for SNAP, you're going to get employment help. When you come in for Medicaid, you're going to get employment help. It's a system where you're always directed toward flourishing," Ford said.

Prior to the reforms, Utah's employment-to-population ratio was 4.2 percentage points above the national average. Today, that ratio stands at 7.3 percentage points higher.

Utah is grandfathered in as the only state that can integrate workforce-development with safety-net programs in the way they are doing it. But North Carolina may still be able to consolidate the programs under one roof to a much greater degree.

The legislature discussed convening a study committee to examine similar reforms in the Tar Heel State.

During the hearing, Sen. Tim Moffitt, R-Henderson, noted that much of the focus is on single-parent households headed by mothers.

"Where are the fathers of these children? What role are they not fulfilling as the backbone of the family? Even if the mom and dad are no longer together, the father still has a re-

sponsibility," Moffitt said. "These programs are really band aids to a greater problem. And I think that we need to have an honest discussion about what that problem is."

Benefits cliffs

The legislature also heard from Brittany Birken, director of community and economic development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, about the problem of "benefits cliffs."

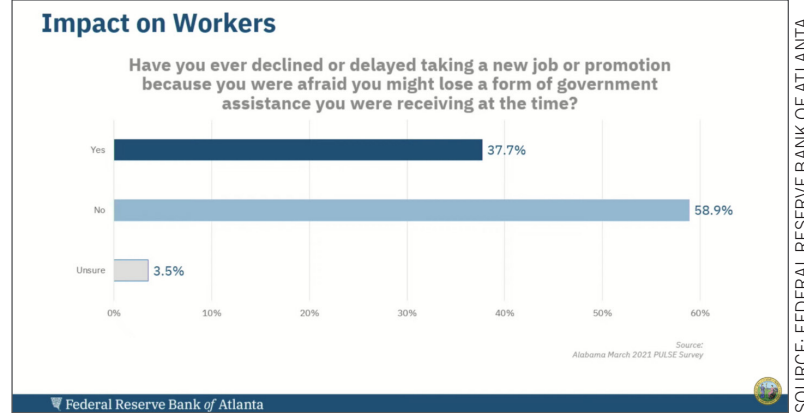
Benefits cliffs occur when a small wage increase puts a family over the threshold to stop receiving public benefits. The wage increase isn't sufficient to offset the loss of benefits, resulting in a net loss of income for the family, according to Birken.

Lawmakers discussed including the issue of benefits cliffs in the study committee looking into One Door consolidation of safety-net programs.

Birken relayed a story from Florida where a single mom with two young children had been offered a 10-cent-an-hour raise. She said if her math was correct, she would lose her benefits through the childcare subsidy program.

"We confirmed her math. For that \$200 a year increase, she was going to lose access to \$9,000 in childcare subsidies," Birken said. "The real dilemma that families can face is advancing in their career or making financial ends meet."

The types of programs involved are means-tested government programs meant to alleviate poverty. Examples include food stamps, Medicaid, child-



care subsidies, rental assistance for housing, and refundable tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit.

According to a 2021 pulse survey from Alabama, benefits cliffs are a major barrier for low-income workers. Asked if they had ever declined or delayed a new job or promotion due to losing public benefits, nearly 40% of the respondents said they had.

In one example Birken gave, a family would be no better off making \$49,000 a year than they would be at \$14,000 a year with public benefits included.

"We know that these short-term barriers may prevent the workers' realization of long-term gains" said Birken. "So it could be in the financial interest of the family long term to continue advancing the careers, but the barriers, if it's putting financials upside down, are going to make the family face challenges in climbing over those hurtles."

Fixing benefits cliffs would also have benefits for broader society, Birken said. One example is a person moving from a min-

imum-wage job to become a registered nurse. Over the lifetime of their career, there would be a savings to taxpayers of nearly \$350,000.

A recent report by the Georgia Center for Opportunity focused on the ways benefits cliffs in North Carolina discourage economic advancement. The study gave an example of a single mother of two children who would require a 67% raise at an annual income of \$32,000 in order to overcome losses in benefits from bringing in more income.

"I'm seeing this everywhere, and it's going to continue to happen until we put controls in place and hopefully come up with some new policy," said Rep. Kanika Brown, D-Forsyth, during the committee meeting.

Brown offered the possibility of giving people a window of time after receiving a pay raise before their public benefits phase out.

Birken said states can explore implementing transition periods for benefit losses to help families weather them better.



The only defense against the world is coffee.

- John Locke, probably

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Nearly \$200 million wagered in NC's first week of sports betting

BY THERESA OKEPA

Online sports betting proved to be big business the first week it became legal in North Carolina. According to a Sports Betting Report released March 27 by the North Carolina State Lottery Commission, over \$198 million was wagered by North Carolinians, while payouts amounted to \$141.5 million.

A further breakdown revealed that almost \$24 million was wagered on March 11, the first day online sports betting became legal in the state, with a little over \$11 million being paid out.

The ACC Men's Basketball Tournament, which began March 12, and NCAA March Madness had a large impact on bets.

Reports say about \$600 million in total wagers were expected for the first month of legal online betting.

On Feb. 29, The North Carolina State Lottery Commission (NCSLC) granted seven companies the first sports betting licenses in the state including:

- **Betfair Interactive US, LLC** (dba: FanDuel Sportsbook)
- **BETMGM, LLC.**

- **Crown NC Gaming, LLC** (dba: DraftKings)
- **FBG Enterprises Opco, LLC** (dba: Fanatics Sportsbook)
- **Hillside (North Carolina), LLC** (dba: bet365)
- **Penn Sports Interactive, LLC** (dba: ESPN BET)
- **Underdog Sports Wagering LLC**

Tribal Casino Gaming Enterprise, an enterprise of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, was also approved.

Democrat Gov. Roy Cooper signed House Bill 347 into law last June to authorize sports betting in the Tar Heel State at the Spectrum Center in Charlotte, where the Charlotte Hornets play.

Under the new law, the state will allow up to 12 online sports betting apps to operate within the state. Prospective interactive gambling operators must pay a \$1 million application fee to apply for a state-issued wagering license, with an additional \$1 million renewal fee after five years. The state will tax operators an 18% privilege tax for their activities.

Eight sports venues, including Charlotte's Spectrum Center, can apply for in-person sports

books. Other NC venues allowed under the law are PNC Arena, WakeMed Soccer Park, Bank of America Stadium, Charlotte Motor Speedway, North Wilkesboro Speedway, Sedgfield Country Club, and Quail Hollow Country Club.

Multiple state government departments will receive revenue gathered from associated taxes and fees. Approximately \$2 million will go to the NC Department of Health and Human Services to fund gambling addiction treatment, while the NC Outdoor Heritage Advisory Council will receive \$1 million annually to issue grants. Another \$1 million will go to NC Amateur Sports, a nonprofit that sponsors amateur and youth sports initiatives.

Athletic departments of 13 state-run universities will also receive funding, each receiving \$300,000 annually: Appalachian State, East Carolina, Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State, North Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central, UNC-Asheville, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Greensboro, UNC-Pembroke, UNC-Wilmington, Western Carolina, and Winston-Salem State.

The remaining proceeds will



Carolina Hurricanes Game 2024

be divided among the 13 universities, North Carolina's General Fund, and the newly created North Carolina Major Events, Games, and Attractions Fund. Under the administration of the state's Commerce Department, the fund will provide grants to entities that "foster job creation and investment" surrounding major sporting events. HB347 names NASCAR races and major men's and women's golf competitions "major events."

According to BetCarolina,

one in six North Carolinians plan on betting once a week, based on a survey the website did of 1,000 residents.

The same survey showed that 15% of North Carolina residents currently engage in sports betting, and 14% say they travel across state lines to place bets in Tennessee or Virginia.

The website also projects that over \$6.4 billion is expected to be wagered by residents this year on sports betting.

Lawmakers could boost Opportunity Scholarship funding in short session

BY DAVID BASS

Leaders in the General Assembly say they are in discussions over whether to boost funding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program due to surging demand.

Around 72,000 new applications were received for the upcoming school year for Opportunity Scholarships, a program that provides between \$3,360 and \$7,468 a year to allow families to choose a private school education for their children. Beginning this year, scholarships are prioritized based on four income tiers, with the lowest-earning households receiving first priority.

Lawmakers are set to convene for the short session of the General Assembly in late April. The short session's primary goal is to make budget adjustments for the two-year biennium, in addition to dealing with non-fiscal bills that made the crossover deadline from the 2023 long session.

Making adjustments to Opportunity Scholarship appropriations could be part of that. Unless revisions are made, tens of thousands of families would be put on a waitlist.

"When lawmakers lifted the cap on eligibility for the Op-



Rep. Tricia Cotham, R-Mecklenburg, speaks at a press conference in support of Opportunity Scholarships.

portunity Scholarship, it gave new hope to countless families across North Carolina," said Robert Luebke, director of the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation. "The 72,000 new applicants for the program attests to this fact. If lawmakers approve a universal program, it must be their intent to fund it. To do otherwise wouldn't make a lot of sense and risk making thousands of families angry and disappointed — in an election year."

Here's how the math works. Currently, 32,341 students are receiving Opportunity Scholarships. The NC Education Assistance Authority, the state agen-

cy responsible for administering Opportunity Scholarships, does not have data on how many of these students applied for renewals for the upcoming school year. But assuming that 80% of existing applicants successfully renewed, that's 25,873 of the total students.

For the 2022-23 school year, the average scholarship amount was \$5,266. If the same holds true for renewals, the cost would be \$136,246,218.

With an estimated \$293.5 million available for Opportunity Scholarships for the upcoming school year, that would leave around \$157 million available for new applicants.

The breakdown on which income tier the new applicants for the scholarships fall into, and the corresponding dollar amount attached to each, is as follows:

- **Tier 1: 13,680 students, \$7,468 for each scholarship = \$102,162,240**
- **Tier 2: 18,720 students, \$6,722 for each scholarship = \$125,835,840**
- **Tier 3: 26,640 students, \$4,480 for each scholarship = \$119,347,200**
- **Tier 4: 12,960 students, \$3,360 for each scholarship = \$43,545,600**

That's a total of \$390,890,880 for new applicants. Subtracting the estimated \$157 million in existing leftover funding, lawmakers would possibly need to allocate in additional \$234 million, roughly, to fully fund all scholarships.

As reported by Carolina Journal, on the House side, legislators confirmed they are discussing the possibility of increasing funds. On the Senate side, officials remain open to discussing potential funding changes.

"The surge in Opportunity Scholarship applications is the latest sign that North Carolina families value having choice in education," said Lauren Horsch, spokesperson for Senate Leader Phil Berger. "Just like any other budget item, legislators will discuss potential funding changes as they make budget revisions during the short session."

"Demand for [Opportunity Scholarships] by low-income and working-class families is so strong that some of them could be sitting on a waitlist this year," said Mike Long, president of Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina, in a statement. "Because of that we encourage lawmakers at the General Assembly to continue expanding access to Opportunity Scholarships as soon as possible."

EDUCATE Act would end race-based mandates in medical schools

BY CJ STAFF

US Rep. Greg Murphy, R-NC3, a physician, has introduced a bill in Congress that would ban race-based mandates in medical schools. His bill, Embracing Anti-Discrimination, Unbiased Curricula, and Advancing Truth in Education (EDUCATE) Act, would cut federal funding, including student loans, to medical schools that have offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or require students and staff to pledge to specific beliefs.

"American medical schools are the best in the world and no place for discrimination," said Murphy in a press release on the legislation. "The EDUCATE Act compels medical schools and accrediting agencies to uphold colorblind admissions processes and prohibits the coercion of students who hold certain political opinions. Diversity strengthens medicine, but not if it's achieved through exclusionary practices. Medicine is about serving others and doing the best job possible in every circumstance. We cannot afford to sacrifice the excellence and quality of medical education at the hands of prejudice and divisive ideology."

The bill comes as medical schools, like the one at the University of North Carolina, re-examine their own DEI policies. The university did away with its DEI task force last summer without implementing its recommendations. UNC also banned DEI statements from admissions, hiring, promotion, and tenure.

The task force had partially based its recommendations on policies of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), which requires students to study topics like "Unconscious Bias Awareness," "Understanding and Responding to Microaggressions," and "Understanding that America's medical system is structurally racist." The American College of Surgeons (ACS) also launched a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion toolkit for providers in December.

The EDUCATE Act would require accrediting agencies like AAMC to ensure that their accreditation standards do not require DEI practices "while still allowing instruction about health issues tied to race or collecting data for research," according to bill sponsors. The AAMC is actively lobbying against the bill.

"The Task Force was initiated as a means to emphasize compliance with the School of Medicine's and the Department of Health Sciences' shared mission of improving the health and wellbeing of North Carolinians. While we remain committed to these important missions, the recommendations have not been operationalized and the Task Force has concluded its work," wrote UNC senior counsel Kirsten Stevenson in a May letter to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. "There is no plan to implement the Task Force's recommendations now or in the future. Even if the recommendations were revisited in the future, further review and revision would be required. A particular area of concern would be compliance with the recent amendments to the UNC systemwide policy on Political Activities of Employees."

The UNC policy amendment prohibits state system schools from requiring employees and students to "affirmatively ascribe to or opine about beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles regarding matters of contemporary political debate or social action as a condition to admission, employment, or professional advancement."

At Duke University Medical School, the issue came up last month as videos of surgical resident Vignesh Raman were removed from the school's website following public criticism. During a presentation, Raman made comments that Duke Hospital "serves a very Southern population" and is "not a VIP hospital" where people fly in from all over to get treated. He also makes a dig toward those who are conservative by saying, "My heart sinks every time I go into a room, and I watch them watching Fox News or if they have a MAGA hat on or they're wearing a Confederate belt." But he later says that the one good thing about the South is that a majority of the

patients are "nonwhite."

He says the team was now "abandoning ... all sort[s] of metrics" regarding hiring standards and is instead focusing on "holistic" life stories and diversity. They are also increasing the diversity of people who read the applications of those applying in hopes that it would boost the diversity of those hired.

Murphy is not the only North Carolina congressman to give attention to this emerging issue. Rep. Dan Bishop, R-NC8, took to social media after Carolina Journal opinion editor David Larson weighed in on the controversy.

Bishop is running to be North Carolina's attorney general in the November 2024 election.



Redistricting lawsuits unlikely to impact fall election

BY CJ STAFF

Four lawsuits challenging North Carolina's congressional and legislative election maps continue to move through federal and state courts. None is expected to influence elections scheduled for the November ballot.

Only one of the redistricting suits featured plaintiffs seeking an injunction to block a challenged election map in 2024. An injunction could have forced state legislators to redraw at least one election map this year. A new set of maps could have delayed at least some primary elections.

That option disappeared on March 28 when the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals issued a 2-1 ruling rejecting an injunction. Instead, the federal case *Pierce v. North Carolina State Board of Elections* will move forward to trial after the November election.

In *Pierce*, plaintiffs challenge two state Senate districts in northeastern North Carolina. Critics accuse Republican mapmakers of engaging in racial gerrymandering.

They argue that one Senate district in the region should favor a minority candidate.

In court documents filed in early April, plaintiffs asked US District Judge James Dever to schedule a trial in the case on Dec. 2. Legislative leaders who are defending the Senate map prefer a Feb. 3, 2025, trial date. Both parties expect the trial to last a week. The outcome could affect Senate districts in 2026.

Two other federal redistricting lawsuits are now consolidated before one three-judge panel. Appeals Court Judge Allison Jones Rushing and District Court Judges Richard Myers and Thomas Schroeder will oversee *Williams v. Hall* and *North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP v. Berger*.

Republican presidents appointed all three judges. Chief 4th Circuit Judge Albert Diaz, an Obama administration appointee, assigned Rushing and Myers to the redistricting panel.

In *Williams*, plaintiffs working with Democratic operative Marc Elias' law firm challenge North Carolina's new congressional election map. Political observers have predicted that new US House districts are likely to shift the state's current congressional delegation from its current 7-7 split between the two major parties to a 10-4 Republican advantage.

The NAACP case challenges the congressional map along with state House and Senate maps. Left-of-center activist

group Common Cause and individual plaintiffs joined the civil rights group in the legal challenge. Lawyers from the Southern Coalition for Social Justice represent the NAACP plaintiffs.

A consolidation order issued on March 18 cited "common issues of fact and law" linked to the challenged congressional election map. Judges also determined that consolidation would promote "judicial economy and reduce the burden on the parties as a whole by avoiding duplication of effort." Plaintiffs in the two cases had filed objections to consolidation. The judges' order labeled plaintiffs' concerns about consolidation "overstated."

An initial pretrial conference in the consolidated cases is scheduled May 22 in Durham.

On the same day, a three-judge panel of state Superior Court judges will hold a hearing in Raleigh linked to the fourth active redistricting lawsuit.

Filed by former state Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr, the *Bard v. Hirsch* suit urges North Carolina courts to recognize a state constitutional right to "fair elections."

Orr's 11 plaintiffs are nine Democrats and two unaffiliated voters who believe the state's new congressional and legislative election maps fall short of a suggested constitutional standard for fairness.

Orr was a registered Republican during his decade on the state's highest court. He is now registered as unaffiliated.

State Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Newby appointed the panel of Superior Court Judges Jeffery Foster of Pitt County, Angela Puckett of Stokes County, and Ashley Gore of Columbus County to hear *Bard v. Hirsch*. All three judges are Republicans.

GOP legislative leaders filed a motion March 6 asking the panel to dismiss Orr's suit. The court filing labeled Orr's claims "non-justiciable," meaning the issue could not be resolved by a court or legal principles.

Orr has labeled his case the "first lawsuit in state history challenging the legitimacy of legislatively created election districts for violating voters' constitutional right to fair elections."

"Plaintiffs contend that the right to 'fair' elections is an unenumerated right reserved by the people and fundamental to the very concept of elections and the underpinnings of democracy," according to the legal complaint. "Without 'fair' elections, the framework of our government would rest not on principle and the will of the people, but instead, on partisan politics, exercised not by political parties or particular entities, but by the heavy hand of government itself, in this case the General Assembly."

Orr's lawsuit targets new Congressional Districts 6, 13, and 14, state Senate District 7, and state House District 105.

If the case survives legislative leaders' motion to dismiss, the three judges will set a schedule for resolving the "fair elections" claims.

RFK Jr acquires enough signatures for NC ballot

BY BRIANNA KRAEMER

In a notable milestone, the Robert F. Kennedy Jr. campaign for president has acquired enough signatures for the candidate's name to appear on the ballot in North Carolina this fall.

The newly formed We The People political party gathered more than 23,000 signatures, far above the requirement to gain ballot access, with over a month to spare and a 60% buffer to protect against invalid signatures. The NC State Board of Elections has yet to verify the signatures.

"North Carolina is the fifth state in which RFK Jr. has collected the necessary signatures to achieve ballot access," the campaign noted in a press release.

Kennedy has met the necessary requirements to be on the ballot in Hawaii, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Utah.

Kennedy would have needed to obtain the standard 83,000 signatures as an independent candidate in the state, but that high bar was avoided by running as a third-party candidate instead. The We The People Party submitted a petition request form with the State Board of Elections to become a recognized political party earlier this year, aiding Kennedy's presidential bid.

"We have the field teams, volunteers, legal teams, paid circulators, supporters, and strategists ready to get the job done," said Stefanie Spear, Kennedy's campaign press secretary.

North Carolina is a prominent battleground state in the presidential election. Presumed Republican nominee Donald Trump held a rally in Greensboro last month; the Biden campaign has made numerous stops in the Tar Heel State so far this year; and Vice President Kamala Harris is expected to visit North Carolina again later this week.

All eyes are on North Carolina, and Kennedy's influence could be detrimental — or advantageous — to Democrats or Republicans. While Kennedy's bid for North Carolina's 16 electoral votes is a heavy lift, the political scion pulls weighty support from both Republicans and Democrats who are displeased with Trump and Biden. Both candidates hold strong dissatisfaction among factions of voters within their respective parties, and Gallup polling shows both carry lower favorability ratings than in 2020.

This raises a critical question facing the two main political parties: Can they sway voters from the opposing camp to support Kennedy, instead of their own party's candidate? Kennedy

will likely be used as a political tool in North Carolina to leverage votes against the either of the other two main candidates.

"Both Republicans and Democrats have taken to influencing the other's primary elections in recent years, whether by promoting a perceived weaker general election candidate in the other party's primary election or advocating for the candidate they believe is more willing to cross the aisle," said Jim Stirling, a research fellow at the John Locke Foundation's Civitas Center for Public Integrity. "Both parties will be incentivized to use RFK's candidacy as a tool to pull away voters from their opponent's base."

Republicans who are skeptical of vaccines are intrigued by Kennedy's stance on health and "Big Pharma." However, Kennedy announced left-wing political activist Nicole Shanahan as his running mate, which could dissuade hesitant conservatives. Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democrat popular among some conservatives, reportedly rejected an offer to be Kennedy's running mate.

On the other hand, Democrats who are displeased with Biden's cognitive abilities and handling of foreign affairs could opt for Kennedy, who maintains left-leaning positions. Stirling

notes that political activist organizations may promote Kennedy to the opposite side in order to take votes away from their rivals. The Democratic National Committee has already formed a communications team to counter the messaging of Kennedy and other third-party candidates.

Former President Donald Trump won North Carolina in 2020 by a margin of just 1.34%. In 2016, Trump won with a 3.7% margin. It's unclear how Kennedy's presence will affect these margins in 2024.

According to The Hill, Trump's advantage over Biden is slightly greater when Kennedy's name is included. Recent polling from the Carolina Journal shows Donald Trump holds a 5.4-point lead over incumbent Joe Biden. A plurality of likely voters (45.2%) said they are planning to vote for Trump, while 39.8% said they plan to vote for Biden. A significant minority (9.4%) said they plan to vote for "someone else." If it holds true, this would indicate a marked increase in third-party votes cast in the general election. In 2020, less than 1.5% of North Carolina votes were cast for a candidate other than Biden or Trump.

In more positive news for third parties in North Carolina,

the Democratic Party has been ordered to pay the North Carolina Green Party's legal fees due to "frivolous" and "unreasonable" intervention in the third party's effort to gain ballot access in 2022.

The Green Party was initially not recognized as a political party in 2022 despite collecting more than 2,000 signatures beyond the required threshold. The Green Party sued the NC Board of Elections over their exclusion, while the NC Democratic Party and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee made numerous efforts to prevent the Green Party from being on the ballot.

US District Judge James Dever III, a George W. Bush-appointed judge, ordered the Democrat groups to pay \$6,525 in early April. The Green Party initially requested \$59,268.75 in legal fees.

"While we are loathe to require state intervention to solve problems, we commend the ruling, which gives the Green Party, who were wronged by the Democrats' frivolous and authoritarian lawsuit, some measure of restitution," said Ryan Brown, chair of the North Carolina Libertarian Party.

Officials at the NC Green Party and the NC Democratic Party did not provide comments.

THE CAROLINA JOURNAL

www.carolinajournal.com

Simmons elected to chair NCGOP

BY JEFF MOORE AND THERESA OPEKA

As expected, the North Carolina Republican Party's executive committee selected current executive director Jason Simmons as the new chair at an official meeting in Selma. Jim Womack, chair of the Lee County GOP, had also been in the running for the leadership role.

Simmons had the endorsement of former President Donald Trump backing him up.

"I'm honored to be chosen by my fellow Republicans to lead our party into the most important election in our lifetime," said Simmons in a press release. "There is much work to be done to win North Carolina for President Trump, put Lt. Governor Robinson in the Governor's Mansion, maintain our supermajorities in the General Assembly, and win four statewide judicial races. I'm ready to hit the ground running."

The midterm leadership shuffle was spurred after Trump personally recruited outgoing Chairman Michael Whatley to replace Ronna McDaniel as leader of the Republican National Committee (RNC). Following Whatley's election as RNC chair in early March, along with Trump daughter-in-law Lara Trump as co-chair, the former



New NC GOP Chairman Jason Simmons is pictured with former President Donald Trump, who endorsed him for the position.

president endorsed Simmons to lead the NCGOP.

Whatley formally resigned as NCGOP chairman earlier in the evening.

"I'm excited for Jason to take over as Chairman, and I look forward to working closely with

him to ensure we win North Carolina for President Trump and elect Republicans up and down the ballot," said Whatley in a statement.

Trump doubled down on his endorsement for the next leader of the NCGOP as his campaign

continues to emphasize the importance of North Carolina in the electoral landscape.

"North Carolina is a critical battleground state," Danielle Alvarez, senior advisor to the Trump campaign, told CJ in a phone call. "Chairman Michael

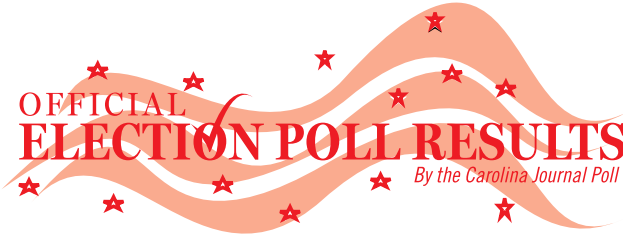
Whatley had such a strong tenure in North Carolina that the president asked him to run the entire Republican National Committee, and now we need to make sure to have a winner in NC because it's such a crucial state — Jason Simmons is that person."

The Trump campaign views North Carolina as a must-win state for the former president to be successful in his 2024 bid for the White House. In recruiting Whatley to head up the RNC, it was important to Trump to not leave a vacuum in leadership at the NCGOP, campaign officials tell CJ. That led to Trump's personal endorsement of Simmons, who served as executive director during Whatley's tenure, for continuity approaching the fall elections.

New chair elections for the NCGOP are typically held during the state party's convention in odd-numbered years (non-election years), and elected by a vote of state convention delegates. This year is an even-numbered election year, but, due to the early resignation of the outgoing chair, the NCGOP executive committee was called upon to elect a replacement to fulfill the rest of his two-year term.

Simmons will be chairman until the next scheduled election in June 2025.

10 NC POLLING



Trump, Robinson lead Democrat rivals in post-primary NC poll

BY DAVID BASS

If North Carolina voters were casting their ballots for president and governor today, the Republican candidates would handily win, according to the latest results from the Carolina Journal poll.

Former President Donald Trump secured 45% support, compared to 40% who said they'd vote for President Joe Biden, and 9.4% who said they planned to vote for "someone else."

"Trump's lead is somewhat unsurprising given that he won the state in 2016 and 2020, by 3.6% and 1.3%, respectively," said Carolina Journal publisher and John Locke Foundation CEO Donald Bryson. "However, it's still 238 days to Nov. 5,

and we'll be watching to see how this fluctuates."

In the gubernatorial race, Republican Mark Robinson captured 44% of the vote to Democrat Josh Stein's 39%. Robinson is the current lieutenant governor and Stein the current attorney general.

"Both Josh Stein and Mark Robinson have shown the ability to win statewide races and raise money — the race for the Executive Mansion is the one to watch in North Carolina," Bryson said.

The poll results, culled shortly after the North Carolina primary on March 5, surveyed 600 likely general election voters.

Based on the results, Republicans would also sweep several other races on the 10-member Council of State, which includes key positions like governor, lieu-

tenant governor, attorney general, as well as secretary and commissioner roles for various executive branch departments.

In the race for attorney general, Republican Dan Bishop snagged 41% of the vote to Democrat Jeff Jackson's 39%.

For labor commissioner, Republican Luke Farley comes out on top with 42% of the vote to Democrat Braxton Winston's 35%, while Republican Brad Briner secures 43% of the vote to Democrat Wesley Harris' 37% in the race for state treasurer.

For insurance commissioner, incumbent Republican Mike Causey wins 43% of the vote to Democrat Natasha Marcus' 37%. Meanwhile, in the race for superintendent of public instruction, Republican Michele Morrow edges out Democrat Mo-

Green 41% to 39%.

"Superintendent Catherine Truitt's primary election loss and four open seats make 2024 a volatile year for the North Carolina Council of State," Bryson said. "Aside from the drama of these individual races, there is also the question of whether Republicans can maintain their majority on the council, which also makes policy decisions."

Republicans also improved their advantages on the generic legislative and congressional ballots. Forty-nine percent of respondents said they would pick a GOP candidate for the General Assembly, while 43% would pick a Democrat. Similarly, 48% would pick a Republican for Congress compared to 43% picking a Democrat.

Biden's approval rating re-

mains deeply underwater, with 59% disapproving and 38% approving. Forty-nine percent approve of NC Gov. Roy Cooper and 43% disapprove.

Public frustration with inflation is a big contributor to these weak numbers for Biden, with 20% of both Republicans and Democrats in the CJ Poll saying the economy was their top voting issue. Among Republicans, 45% of voters said immigration was the most important issue, while among Democrats 25% said abortion was most important.

The issues that are top of mind for voters overall are immigration at 25%, the economy at 18%, abortion at 13%, inflation at 10%, taxes and spending at 7%, public safety at 5%, education at 4%, and energy and environment at 3%.

Top Priority

Which of the following issues was most important to you as you cast votes in the primary election?

Cygnal Polling, on behalf of John Locke Foundation, surveyed 600 likely general election voters from March 6-7, 2024 with a margin of error of ±3.99%.

THE CAROLINA JOURNAL POLL



Biden, Harris return to NC trailing in polls

BY DONNA KING

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have made multiple recent trips to urban areas of North Carolina, joined by Gov. Roy Cooper, a fellow Democrat.

First Lady Jill Biden and cabinet members like Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan are also putting the Tar Heel State on their target list for 2024.

In March, a rare joint visit with both the president and the vice president garnered a record \$2.3 million at a political fundraiser in downtown Raleigh.

Biden's March speech centered on the Obamacare anniversary, with repeated attacks on pharmaceutical companies for drug prices, but he also called for increased taxes, deficit reduction, and a spending boost for Ukraine. He repeatedly used the word "MAGA" in reference to former President Donald Trump and other Republicans on Capitol Hill.

"Even during the pandemic, Trump and his MAGA friends in Congress wanted to get rid of the ACA and kick millions of Americans off their health insurance. It's sick," said Biden.

Why North Carolina?

North Carolina tops Biden's list of target states where he can ally with Democrat governors like Cooper. But the visits have been in urban "blue" areas of the state, where their Democrat policy priorities are likely to garner crowd support.

Once outside of the Triangle and Charlotte, the mood sours on the Biden presidency. In Carolina Journal's latest poll, 54% of urban respondents approve of the job Biden is doing. Among suburban voters, 42% approve.

However, among rural voters, Biden has just a 28% approval rating and a 69% disapproval rating.

North Carolina's First Congressional District is among those rural areas of the state struggling under the weight of inflation. And this fall, the Republican National Committee, now led by former NCGOP Chairman Michael Whatley, hopes to flip NC-1. The district is currently represented by Democrat Rep. Don Davis.

"Joe Biden and Don Davis are directly to blame for out-of-control inflation across North Carolina. Biden lost North Carolina in 2020, and he, along with Don Davis, will lose it again in 2024," said NRCC spokeswoman Delanie Bomar in a press statement.

With such low approval ratings, and knowing that no Dem-

ocrat presidential candidate has won this state in 16 years, why is the Biden campaign spending so much time and capital in North Carolina with a term-limited Democrat governor?

"Biden lost North Carolina by less than 75,000 votes in 2020, the smallest margin of any state Trump won," said Andy Jackson, director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity at the John Locke Foundation. "That makes North Carolina the only state Trump won in 2020 where Biden has a realistic path to victory in 2024. In other words, the Tar Heel State is the only place the Biden campaign can play offense while defending the 'blue wall' of Trump 2016/Biden 2020 states such as Wisconsin, Georgia, and Pennsylvania."

In addition, Biden sees Cooper as one of his strongest ambassadors for the administration's policies. Cooper is on the Biden-Harris 2024 National Advisory Board with former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, and other national party heavyweights.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators interrupt speech

But not all those in the left-wing base are happy with their presumptive nominee's record. Biden's speech at Chavis Com-

munity Center was interrupted by pro-Palestinian demonstrators shouting in the audience, "What about healthcare in Gaza?"

"Be patient with them. They have a point. We need a lot more care in Gaza," said Biden.

The demonstrators were escorted out by police, as Democrat Attorney General Josh Stein, state House Minority Leader Robert Reives, and others rose to applaud Biden. Stein was front and center at the Biden speech, running to succeed Cooper as the next Democrat governor of North Carolina. The Republican Governor's Association took the opportunity to draw a public connection between Stein and the unpopular president with a mobile billboard circulating in Raleigh.

"North Carolina families are less safe because of Josh Stein's failed leadership and the dangerous Biden-Harris agenda of increased crime, and a spiking drug crisis," said RGA National Press Secretary Courtney Alexander. "With Biden and Harris in town, North Carolinians deserve to know the facts about the real Josh Stein."

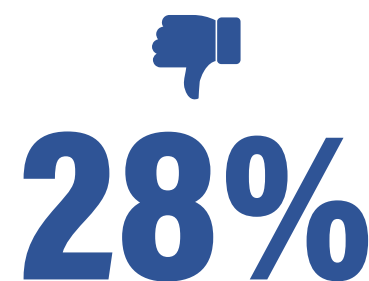
As the president wrapped up his speech, he was joined on stage by Cooper and Harris waving to supporters.

"This guy right here, this is the best governor in the United States," Biden said, gesturing to Cooper.

By the Numbers:



Record Democrat fundraiser in downtown Raleigh



Biden's approval rating among rural NC voters



of votes Trump won NC by in 2020



Gubernatorial Ballot

If the 2024 election for North Carolina Governor was held today, and you had to make a choice, who would you vote for out of the following options?

43.8% Republican Mark Robinson



39% Democrat Josh Stein



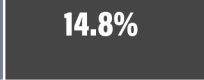
0.6% Green Party Wayne Turner



1.8% Libertarian Mike Ross

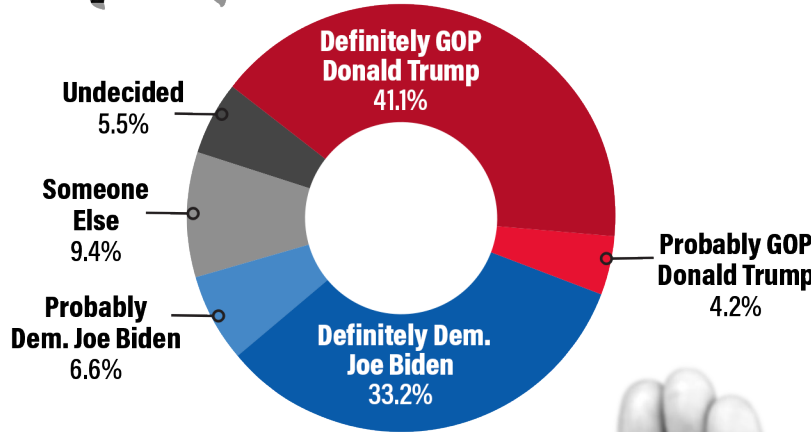


14.8% Undecided



Presidential Ballot

If the 2024 general election for President was held today, and you had to make a choice, who would you vote for out of the following options?



12 CONTINUED

NCSBE certifies 2024 Primary

continued from PAGE 4

Over 1.1 million voted on Election Day this year, a decline from the 1.29 million who voted on Election Day in 2020's primary.

Normally, Democrats are noted for early voting and voting by mail over Republicans, but that wasn't the case in this year's primary. Brinson Bell said there was a 10% uptick of Republicans choosing to vote absentee by mail or in early voting, along with a slight rise for unaffiliated, while Democratic voters decreased in those areas.

She noted that even though voter ID was implemented in the 2023 municipal elections, this was the first large-scale use of it.

"We were just short of 1,200 (1,185) voters who cast a provisional ballot for a reason related to photo ID, so that breaks down to about 6.6 out of every 10,000 ballots that were cast," Brinson Bell said. "We were able to count 697 of these provisional ballots that were related to photo ID, so that's about a 59% acceptance rate."

The numbers ended with 557 filling out an ID exception form and casting their ballot provisionally.

Reasonable impediment was listed for 550 voters. Four noted religious objections to being photographed, and three voters cited natural disaster. One-hundred forty, people voted provisionally but without an ID exception form because they indicated that they did not have a proper ID, so they voted provisionally and then returned to the county board of elections to present their ID during the canvass.

There were 11 provisional ballots, or 1% related to photo ID, that were counted partially, meaning they were not in the proper precinct on Election Day, and there were contests on that ballot that were not within their jurisdiction. NCSBE was, however, able to partially count those within their voting jurisdiction.

Also, 477 provisional ballots related to ID were not counted. And the vast majority were voters who did not return to the county board of elections with an ID during the canvass.

The deadline for absentee by mail was also changed for the primary election.

In previous years, the absentee ballot would be accepted and counted if it was postmarked by Election Day and received within three days after the election.

For the 2024 primary, the absentee ballot

had to be received at the county board of elections by 7:30 pm on Election Day.

In 2020, there were 800 ballots that were not counted that came in after the deadline. In 2024, 1,128 ballots came in after the Election Day 7:30 pm deadline.

Brinson Bell said the provision for those in the military and citizens who are overseas is still in effect, and they can have their ballots counted after Election Day.

Next, they discussed the voter history audit, which is designed to identify significant discrepancies that could be a sign of election fraud, such as ballot stuffing, fraudulent manual entries, or tampering with media cards. It can also identify certain ballot coding errors.

All 100 counties have completed their voter histories except Roberson County, which is almost complete. There were 27 counties with voter history and ballots that matched exactly. Sixty counties had differences of one, two, or three, and 12 counties had differences of four or more. Brinson Bell said they are working with those counties to understand why, but in most cases, it is related to things like voters not wanting to vote on the

ballot associated with their party affiliation. There are variances of 170 ballots, fewer than two ballots per county, with differences between voter history and ballots cast.

The sample audit, which has been required since state law implemented it in 2006, checks the accuracy of the equipment.

Statewide, counties hand counted the presidential contest for 169 Election Day precincts, 22 early voting sites, and nine counties conducted a hand count for all absentee-by-mail ballots.

For the 2024 primary, of the 200 samples audited (more than 103,100 ballots statewide), the audits found 14 differences between the machine count and the human count among a total of 11 ballot groups. The average ballot count difference in those 11 groups was 1.3.

Differences were attributed to human error, such as a voter using an x instead of filling in the bubble, or to human error during the hand count.

In the other 189 sample groups, the machine and hand counts matched exactly.

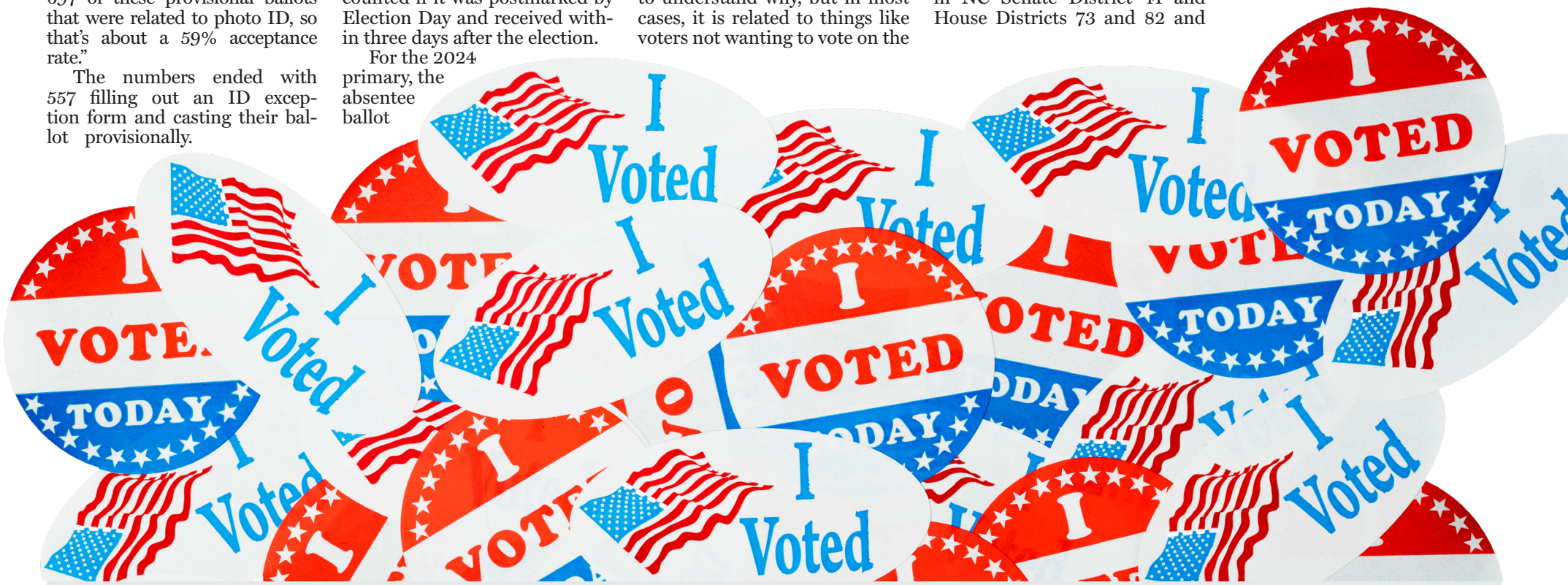
There were three protests in NC Senate District 41 and House Districts 73 and 82 and

a recount for a county commissioner in District 5 in Robeson County. All protests have since been resolved in favor of the initial declared winner.

The protests did not concern how the ballots were counted, but they did concern some other irregularity alleged about the election, which didn't impede the board's voting to certify the primary.

"In today's environment, it's extraordinarily important that the public have faith in what we do and the more steps we can take to be sure that members of the public believe that the vote count is appropriate and we're doing what we're supposed to do in the preservation of democracy," said Alan Hirsch, board chairman.

The board also voted in favor of holding the second primary runoff election on May 14 in the race for the Republican nominations for lieutenant governor with Hal Weatherman and Jim O'Neill, the state auditor's race with Jack Clark and Dave Boliak, and US NC-13 congressional race between Kelly Daughtry and Brad Knott.



Illegal immigrants

continued from PAGE 5

The illegal alien gang members were also charged with illegally possessing 60 firearms.

500 illegal immigrants released from jails

According to ICE data obtained by Charlotte's WBTV,

in 2019 nearly 500 illegal immigrants were released from jails across the state despite administrative detainers filed against them by ICE. They were initially charged with sex offenses, kidnapping, arson, and homicide.

ICE often uses a detainer to keep undocumented immigrants in jail because removal from the country is a civil action and not a criminal matter.

ICE has repeatedly asked local jurisdictions to reconsider non-cooperation policies enacted in recent years because "those policies put politics before pub-

lic safety and release criminals back into communities where they are free to reoffend," including six of 12 criminal illegal immigrants arrested by ICE in September 2020, who had active ICE detainers.

House Bill 10, Require Sheriffs to Cooperate with ICE, which Page supported, would have required sheriffs to contact ICE if they cannot confirm the citizenship status of someone in their custody accused of serious felonies and violent crimes. Although it passed in the House in March, it ended in the Senate Rules

Committee.

"This unprecedented surge in illegal immigration isn't an accident," Eric Ruark, director of research for Numbers USA, a non-profit that advocates for immigration restrictions, told Fox News. "It is the result of deliberate policy choices by the Biden administration."

Now, with falling poll numbers for his re-election and failed policies, Biden is looking at taking executive action to restrict the ability of illegals to claim asylum.

Too little, too late?

"I'll be honest with you, I think we're in a worse situation than we were on 9/11," Page told CJ.

He said people from about 150 countries are coming into the US and are not being properly vetted, especially those on the Terrorist Watchlist, thanks in part to Title 42 ending last May.

"As a sheriff, I communicate with sheriffs across the country and across the state, and it's not if we're going to get hit," he stated. "We're going to get hit. It's just when."

'Carbon Plan'

continued from PAGE 5

nuclear, explains Jon Sanders, director of the Center for Food, Power, and Life at the John Locke Foundation.

"Regular people want access to power whenever they flip on a switch," said Sanders. "They don't want to be dependent upon daylight, clear skies, and the presence of wind in order to keep their refrigerators

running and heat and cool their homes. They also don't want to pay much higher power bills for this unreliability."

Despite low costs being a top priority, model data show monthly costs for energy customers are expected to increase significantly in the years ahead. Power generated from new power plants costs more than power from existing power plants, and state law allows the cost of building new power plants to fall on electricity consumers through increases in their power bills.

OPINION

Intellectual diversity lacking at top NC law schools

DAVID LARSON
OPINION EDITOR



DEREK T. MULLER, a Notre Dame Law School professor, recently published research on his personal site showing the political contributions of his fellow law professors at major American law schools. What he found is not surprising, but it is fairly disheartening to those who hold traditional American beliefs on things like freedom of speech, limited government, and a free-market economy, and want them passed on to the next generation.

Unlike earlier research by The College Fix that looked at the party registration of professors (finding 16 times more registered Democrats than Republicans at UNC Chapel Hill), this research looked solely at which party these professors donated to. And when they put their money where their minds are, it is decidedly left of center.

Most schools on the list didn't have a single law professor that donated to a Republican candidate. Of the law schools he looked at in North Carolina (Duke, UNC Chapel Hill, and Wake Forest), only Duke had a professor who gave exclusively to Republicans (and also another professor who had given to candidates of both parties). The other 40 Duke professors gave exclusively to Democrats.

At UNC Chapel Hill and Wake Forest University's law schools, there wasn't even a token Republican professor. Every single professor who made political contributions donated solely to Democrats.

This, of course, excludes

professors who made no contributions or whose contributions were not reported because they were less than \$200. So it's possible there are Republican professors who are stingy with political donations (or don't give because they don't want to be identified as the campus wingnut).

School	D	R	Both
Stanford	30	2	
Yale	27		
Chicago	23	1	1
Penn	28		
Duke	40	1	1
Harvard	56		1
NYU	50		3
Columbia	32	2	
Virginia	38		2
Berkeley	34		1
Michigan	46		
Northwestern	32		1
Cornell	22		
UCLA	42	1	
Georgetown	74	2	1
Minnesota	19	1	
Texas	37		1
USC	19		
Vanderbilt	19		1
Georgia	13		
Washington U.	18		
BYU	6	2	
Florida	22		
North Carolina	22		
Ohio State	19	1	
Wake Forest	27		

But, as the chart above shows, from

what we know, there are 89 law professors at these three top North Carolina law schools who donate exclusively to Democrats and only a single (likely frightened) Duke professor who donates exclusively to Republicans.

When I posted these figures on social media, most of the comments defending this reality said one of three things:

1. Too bad. It's free speech.
2. They may all be left-wing, but professors don't let their views taint their lessons.
3. They only hire smart people, and left-wingers are smarter.

It's true that private universities like Duke and Wake Forest have a right to hire who they want and that those professors have the freedom to their views. But it's still worthwhile to know that virtually everyone being chosen to teach has a left-wing worldview.

That leads to the second defense, that maybe they can hold these views while still teaching from an absolutely unbiased objective perspective. Those who think this is likely, or even possible, haven't met many left-wing professors. They could also talk to any recent conservative college graduate, who would gladly give them hours of examples about how, say, a lesson on Shakespeare turned into a discussion against the gender binary or how there was at least one mention of Donald Trump in every meeting of their art history course.

And on the third point — that the left has simply won ev-

ery intellectual battle so the only people smart enough to be professors are left-wingers — I'm sure that feels really nice for those on campus to assume. Off campus, though, the common understanding of these battles is very different.

In fact, many not-all-that-stupid people think the left is on the wrong side of every major policy battle of recent years:

- Command economies vs. free markets
- Border security
- Solar and wind vs. nuclear and natural gas
- Radical gender theory
- School choice
- "Harm reduction" to solve drug crisis
- Defunding police to improve policing
- COVID shutdowns
- Impact of debt on inflation
- Abandoning merit and equality under the law for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

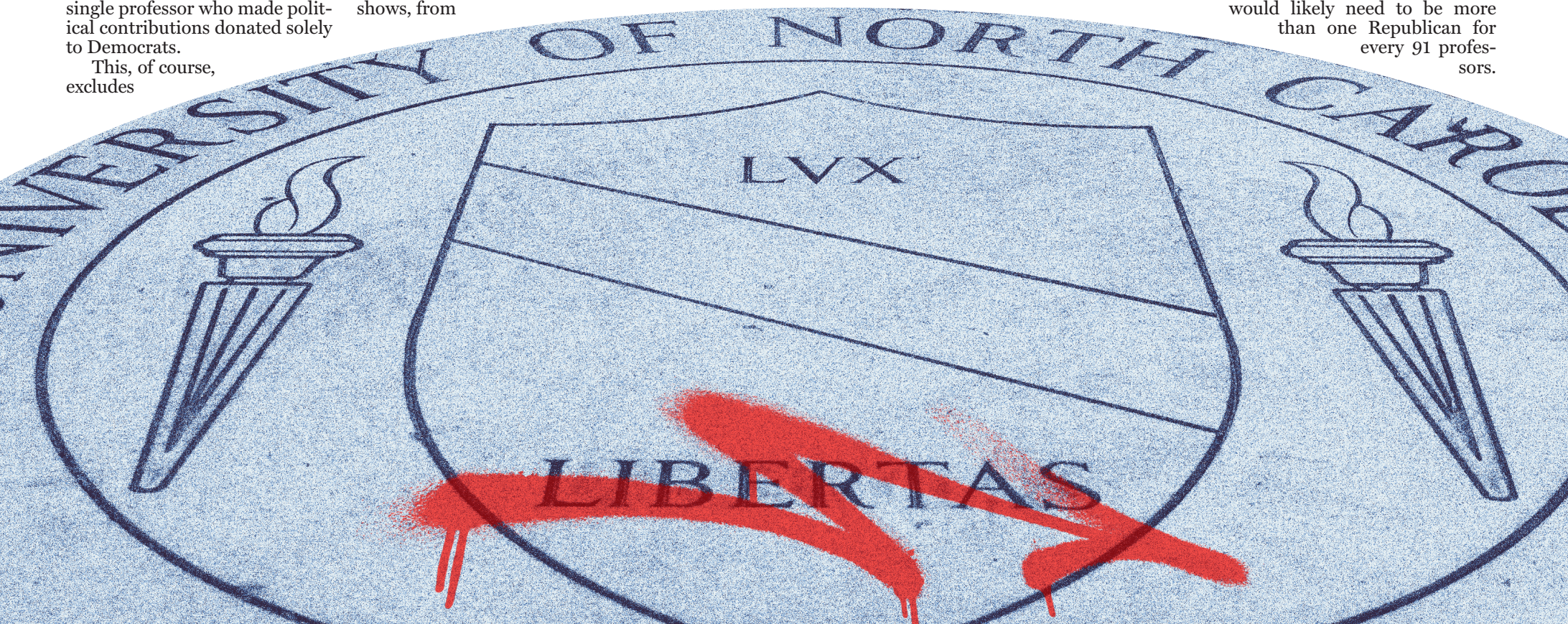
I'm sure they have their own understandings of all these issues, but many of those views only thrive because they go unchallenged in a bubble free of inconvenient facts.

Most college professors, like mine back in the early-to-mid 2000s, likely have their hearts in the right place often, like with wanting to keep the planet healthy, protect the vulnerable, and advance human dignity. As a lefty at that time, I largely nodded along. But

most of their well-intentioned solutions to these real problems have enormous unintended consequences — inefficient, intermittent energy from solar panels leads to increased costs and decreased reliability; "harm reduction" strategies for drugs enable users and lead to spikes in crime and overdose deaths; defunding police leads to more violence; and on and on.

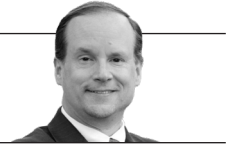
Regarding DEI and merit, top institutions of high education, like Duke University's School of Medicine, appear to explicitly choose their students and employees by taking into account whether they are of a certain race or gender. Another well-intentioned idea, DEI tries to solve a real problem left over from segregation (that of racial imbalances), but does so in a clumsy, and probably illegal, way, by rejecting individuals simply for falling in categories like white, Asian, male, or something otherwise considered "privileged." (Kind of ironic, isn't it, to give the label "privileged" to the groups denied opportunities for schools and jobs?)

A better way of ensuring diversity and inclusion at these schools would be to accept all the top-performing students, based on traditional metrics (GPA, SAT, ACT, etc), and then expose these students to views representative of the current ideological landscape, not just that of the progressive vanguard. This would give the students a more accurate picture of the world and of what they will encounter once they leave campus. But for this to take place, there would likely need to be more than one Republican for every 91 professors.



Licensing laws shackle labor markets

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



NORTH CAROLINA IS ONE of the toughest places in the country to enter a new career — and that doesn't auger well for our future economic performance.

The issue is occupational licensing. For dozens of professions, North Carolina requires a prospective employee to possess a specified education credential, receive a specified amount of training, pass a licensure exam, or some combination of these criteria.

Am I talking about the licensure of physicians, civil engineers, or emergency medical technicians? Sure — but they aren't controversial examples. Every state licenses professions like those. On the other hand, only a few states license, say, eyelash technicians, apprentice manicurists, or drama movement therapists (yes, that's a thing).

In two recent rankings of state licensing laws, North Carolina fared poorly. A 2022 report by the nonprofit Institute for Justice examined 102 categories of jobs typically filled by younger workers or those without university degrees. Think construction trades, maintenance and repair, transportation, and personal or pet care.

North Carolina law requires licensure for 66 of those occupations, versus 54 in the average state. Overall, the IJ report ranked our state the 17th most-regulated in the country.

That's the (relatively) good news. Here's much-worse news: A separate report by the Archbridge Institute in 2023 ranked



Women train for cosmetology licenses, one of many required NC occupational licenses.

North Carolina *eighth worst* in the country. Its study includes a broader range of occupations — and our state regulated more of them than any of our neighbors.

As far as I can tell, there's no evidence that North Carolinians are, as a result, safer, healthier, or more satisfied with the goods and services they receive. On the other hand, there's plenty of evidence suggesting that North Carolina workers have fewer opportunities, and North Carolina consumers pay higher prices, because of our relatively strict licensing laws.

A just-released paper by two scholars — Patrick McLaughlin from George Mason University's Mercatus Center and Christos Makridis from Stanford and Arizona State — explored these effects in some detail. For example, they found that states are becoming more regulatory over time, not less so, and new restrictions tend to be applied to jobs earning lower-than-median wages.

This isn't necessarily because state lawmakers or regulators are actively targeting these occupations. Most licensing laws are proposed and avidly sup-

ported by people already working in the field. By erecting barriers to entry, they can reduce the competition they face — fewer applicants for positions, fewer bidders on contracts — while also creating new streams of income such as training would-be licensees.

McLaughlin and Makridis quantified the consequences. In their empirical study, a 10% increase in occupational regulation led to a 4.4% drop in employment as well as a 3.3% increase in hourly wages.

"Both the employment and

wage effects are concentrated in low-wage jobs," they wrote, "as well as among respondents with professional licenses."

In a wide-ranging study published last year, economist Peter Orazem of Iowa State and Soumyadip Roy of India's Jindal School of Banking and Finance found that higher levels of occupational licensing were associated with higher unemployment and greater income inequality. Similarly, the University of Minnesota's Morris Kleiner and Wenchen Wang studied occupational licensing for public-sector jobs and found that it tended both to reduce employment and raise wages. The net result was generally "a welfare loss in the public sector," they concluded.

Alicia Plemmons, a professor at Southern Illinois University, investigated whether the stringency of occupational licensing affected where employers and workers chose to set up shop. Her 2022 study in the *British Journal of Industrial Relations* found that as "the monetary cost of fees and the time investment of experience and education for each worker increases, firms are less likely to locate in high-cost states."

Over the past decade, North Carolina has adopted a range of pro-growth policies, from tax and regulatory reform to welcome changes in how our governments build and finance infrastructure. But in one area, occupational licensing, we are a laggard. Our state legislators can and should do better here — better by consumers and future workers.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member.

Court ruling exposes downside of corporate diversity targets

MITCH KOKAI
CONTRIBUTOR



DAVID DUVALL WAS a stand-out employee by Novant Health's standards.

Working in North Carolina, Duvall "performed exceptionally in his role, receiving strong performance reviews and gaining national recognition for himself and the marketing program he developed for Novant Health," according to a March 12 opinion from the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals.

There was one significant problem for Duvall: He is a white man.

His race and sex led to his dismissal in 2018, according to both a trial court and the 4th Circuit. Appellate judges upheld a judgment of more than \$3 million against Novant for Duvall's lost compensation.

Duvall claimed in a federal lawsuit that Novant Health fired him "merely to achieve racial and gender diversity — or more specifically, to hit certain diversity 'targets.'"

A jury agreed. Jurors were willing to give Duvall another \$10 million in punitive damages beyond the lost wages. The trial judge cut that award to \$300,000. Appellate judges struck punitive damages completely.

The Appeals Court determined that Duvall failed to meet the standard of proof required for punitive damages. Yet Judge Steven Agee's 30-page decision spelled out a clear case of Novant Health targeting Duvall's job for "diversity" reasons.

Duvall's tenure with Novant started in 2013.

Jesse Cureton, the company's executive vice president and chief consumer officer, hired Duvall that year to serve as senior vice president of marketing and communications. Duvall reported for five years to Cureton, who is black.

When Cureton fired Duvall in July 2018, the decision "came as a shock to both Duvall and his colleagues," Agee wrote. "Moreover, Novant Health — a multibillion-dollar company with tens of thousands of employees and an extensive human resources department — had no record of any documented criticism of Duvall's performance or reasons for his termination."

In December 2018, Cureton "spoke very highly of Duvall and praised his performance" during a conversation with an executive recruiter. Cureton indicated he would hire Duvall again.

"Immediately after firing Duvall, Novant Health elevated two of Duvall's deputies, a white woman and a black woman, to take over his duties," Agee wrote. "It then later hired another black woman to permanently replace Duvall."

All three candidates for the permanent job were black women. Novant Health rated one of the interim replacements as a "lower performer" than Duvall.

Agee added more context.

In 2015, two years into Duvall's employment with Novant Health, the company's CEO appointed a senior vice president for diversity and inclusion. A companywide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan followed. Novant agreed "to fully 'embed' D&I by 2019."

Cureton and Duvall both served on a company D&I Council. It reviewed data in May 2018 showing a "decline in female leaders" and a "higher representation of whites" in leadership positions. In addition, "the data reflected that 'African-American representation in management decrease[d] at each level [of management] with the exception of the executive team,'" Agee wrote.

Within two months, Duvall was gone.

In February 2019, seven months after Duvall's firing, the diversity council reviewed a report showing that the "company still had a gap in black leadership as compared to industry benchmarks and census data. ... To address that gap, the report recommended a '3-4 percentage point increase' in black leaders over the next three years." The report also "recommended explicit targets" for addressing Hispanic and Asian workforce gaps.

A September 2019 report detailed results of D&I targeting efforts. "The report showed a 3.9 percent decrease in the white work-

force and a 5.6 percent decline in white leaders from 2016 to 2019, compared to a 2 percent increase in the black workforce and a 0.9 percent increase in black leaders over the same period," Agee wrote. "The report also reflected a 21.1 percent increase in female leaders from 2018 to 2019 alone."

Agee delivered the unanimous Appeals Court's conclusion.

"In sum, the jury heard evidence that Duvall performed well in his role but was nonetheless fired and replaced, at one point or another, by three women, two of whom were racial minorities, amid a substantial D&I initiative that called for remaking Novant Health's workforce to reflect a different racial and gender makeup," he wrote. "And it also heard conflicting and uncorroborated reasons for Duvall's termination."

"[W]e do not find that 'the only conclusion a reasonable jury could have reached is one in favor of [Novant Health].' Quite the opposite," Agee added. "There was more than sufficient evidence for a reasonable jury to determine that Duvall's race, sex, or both motivated Novant Health's decision to fire him."

Now Novant has at least 3 million reasons to question its strategy for boosting diversity.

Mitch Kokai is senior political analyst for the John Locke Foundation.

Solar endangering NC farmland

JON SANDERS
CONTRIBUTOR



THE AMERICAN FARMLAND Trust (AFT) ranked North Carolina second in the nation for farmland threatened from residential development. It's a big concern. Agriculture is the state's top industry, employing about one-fifth of the state's workforce.

According to North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, North Carolina has about 8.3 million acres of farmland. Per AFT estimates, about 1.2 million acres of farmland could be lost to residential development by 2040. The state's Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund has preserved only 34,000 acres of working farmland so far.

Residential development isn't the only big threat to our farmland, however. Troxler told Carolina Journal recently that the state had already lost 40,000 to 45,000 acres of farmland to solar facilities. The problem here is that state regulators are calling for Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress (Duke) to build unprecedented amounts of new solar as part of the state's Carbon Plan.

Solar requires a lot of farmland for such an unreliable power source

It's well-known that solar has a voracious appetite for land. The John Locke Foundation's "Policy Solutions" esti-

imated that while a 1,000-megawatt, zero-emissions nuclear facility needs only one square mile and a natural gas facility needs just 1.7 square miles, a solar facility of that size in North Carolina takes up over 13.2 square miles — or about 8,500 acres. As a reminder, that estimate is for 1,000 MWs of new solar. Individual solar facilities tend to be much smaller and dotted across the growing region. Also, the amount of new solar under discussion is much, much larger.

The initial Carbon Plan handed down by the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) on the final day of 2022 called for Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress to procure 2,350 megawatts (MWs) of new solar generation to be placed into service by 2028. It's a huge amount — two and a half times greater than the largest amount of solar Duke has ever interconnected in a single year. That directive also came one month after the NCUC had ordered Duke to procure 1,200 MWs of new solar generation.

The total amount of new solar Duke was ordered to procure is 3,550 MWs. That amount could potentially threaten as much farmland as has been preserved by the trust.

Going further, by 2038 Duke's proposed updated integrated resource plan for the Carolinas would add 17,500 MWs of new solar (some in South Carolina). If that were to happen, it would eliminate around 150,000 acres of farmland.

Solar facilities' enormous land footprints mean they need

to be built away from population centers and therefore require new transmission lines to be built. Solar is also an intermittent power source. Solar facilities produce what they can when they can, based on weather conditions and time of day. As Strata Solar disclosed in its application to build a solar farm on Gov. Roy Cooper's Nash County property: "Solar is an intermittent energy source, and therefore the maximum dependable capacity is 0 MW."

Intermittency is a major problem. The coal plants Duke is directed to close are all baseload power sources. That means they, like nuclear, are the workhorse power plants, the ones supporting the state's known underlying demand for electricity at any point in time. Additional variations of demand above the baseload level can be covered by dispatchable sources, natural gas and hydroelectric. Dispatchable is the opposite of intermittent; a dispatchable source can be ramped up and down quickly in response to fluctuations in electricity demand.

Nevertheless, intermittent solar is being pushed very hard politically with subsidies, laws, and regulations. Replacing one reliable, dispatchable power plant takes numerous solar facilities of the same size just to approximate the productivity lost. A recent brief on reliable power generation discussed this problem.

If politics forbids reliable power generation, then the only answer is to throw a lot of expensive redundancy into the sys-

tem. That is, overbuild. Charge ratepayers to construct eight facilities in the hopes of getting the stated capacity of one. You're still not getting any solar production from evening through morning, though.

Overbuilding also requires lots more transmission infrastructure. Duke rates are already increasing, and Duke officials explained it is mostly because of grid infrastructure improvements and new solar facilities (they opted for the "transitioning to clean energy" euphemism). The NCUC's staff has publicly warned that electricity rates could be "approximately double" by the end of the decade.

How to preserve farmland, agriculture jobs, and reliable power

For these reasons, Locke's

Center for Food, Power, and Life modeled to the NCUC how to achieve the Carbon Plan's goals with less cost and more reliability: Add more zero-emissions nuclear power, pumped storage, battery storage, and natural gas facilities, rather than overbuild solar and wind.

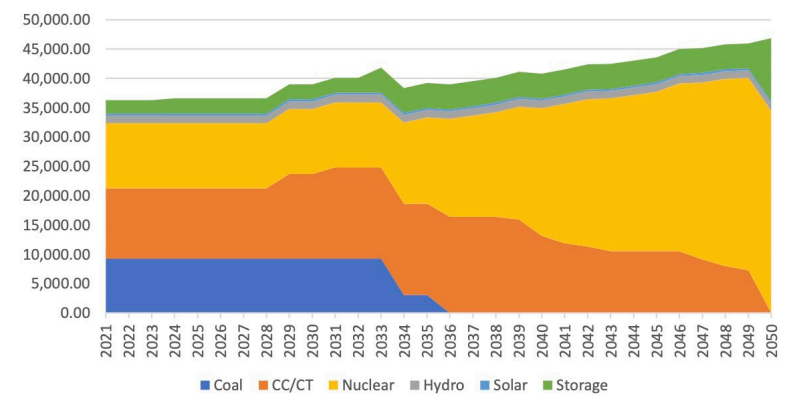
Locke's top recommendation for electricity policy is to pass a law that would:

Require that any retiring source of baseload power generation be replaced with an equal or greater amount of new baseload generation, commensurate with increased electricity demand.

These solutions would also help preserve North Carolina's vital but dwindling farmland in the coming years.

Jon Sanders is director of Locke's Center for Food, Power, and Life.

Model Least-Cost Decarbonization Portfolio: Nuclear, Pumped Storage, Battery Storage, and Natural Gas



Cooper's quiet UN climate scheme

AMY COOKE
CONTRIBUTOR



THE LEFT'S FORCED MARCH into its aggressive green agenda has left devastation in its wake in states across the country, but that hasn't stopped Gov. Roy Cooper from quietly colluding with the elite left to force the agenda on North Carolinians.

Headlines tell the story that politicians and bureaucrats won't. A Politico headline about California warns, "Democrats pushed climate action. Then utility bills skyrocketed." A recent Colorado report predicts monthly utility bills anywhere from \$907 to \$1,279.

Auto dealers have thousands of unwanted electric vehicles. It's so bad that auto unions successfully pressured President Biden to roll back the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Air Act regulations "mandating two-thirds of all cars sold by 2032 must be electric vehicles."

Fortunately, North Caroli-

na lawmakers have taken a more prudent approach to energy policy and the costly green agenda. The General Assembly hasn't used state taxpayer money to incentivize expensive electric vehicles, and it protected ratepayers through House Bill 951 — North Carolina Energy Solutions — by prioritizing reliability and cost over climate activists' preference for expensive, intermittent industrial wind and solar.

Unfortunately, Cooper works with elite climate activists to hinder that prudent approach. He's taken \$1.2 million in United Nations Foundation (UNF) funding to pay for executive branch staff positions to push climate policies that will increase the cost of living and restrict our freedoms. He's done it behind the backs of voters and lawmakers.

So far, neither Cooper nor Democrat gubernatorial hopeful Attorney General Josh Stein have commented on the private funding of influencers within the executive office. Understandably so. It's not a good look.

In 2016, NC voters gave Cooper the Governor's Mansion for the first time and helped send Donald Trump to the White House. Within a year of his election, Cooper joined the US Climate Alliance.

Housed and staffed by the UNF, the alliance is dominated by a group of progressive governors, such as Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, and other Democrat leaders. They have pledged to achieve the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement goals after President Trump, citing high cost and ineffectiveness, formally withdrew the US in June 2017.

When Cooper joined, the alliance wanted to trumpet that "Trump state" North Carolina joined the alliance, but Cooper's communications team rejected the strategy. Instead, they kept a lid on Cooper's participation, quietly taking money from the UNF for executive branch staff positions and pushing the Climate Alliance agenda via execu-

utive order without the General Assembly or North Carolinians getting word of who or what was funding it.

The funding scheme has been exposed thanks to good work from Chris Horner and the non-profit watchdog group Government Accountability and Oversight. In an earlier report, Horner uncovered the machinations, saying, "Documents suggest politicians are now using non-profits and consultants as pass-throughs for donors to support politicians with resources that the relevant legislatures will not provide and that donors cannot legally provide directly."

One email Horner received through an open records request reveals the global scope of influence peddling: "Theres [sic] of course a plethora of advocate and funder interest, a leadership vacuum from the feds, and a voracious appetite at home and abroad, for this sort of governors' initiative."

Alliance spokesman Evan Westrup admitted to the Carolina Journal that UNF funding

"bolsters state-level staff capacity to help Alliance members advance climate priorities, deploy federal funds, and take durable and equitable climate action."

Forget what North Carolinians want. This is what a group of global elitists want for North Carolinians. They privately fund staff positions inside the NC executive branch to get it.

At \$1.2 million, Cooper's office has been the group's largest recipient of the UNF funding, and it's part of a larger climate power play that also funds positions inside some states' attorneys general offices.

For their investment, activist donors got Cooper executive orders targeting statewide carbon emissions and curbing North Carolinians' mobility freedom — get out of your car and into an electric bus, van, or bike. They want to reduce the number of miles driven, and whatever mode of transportation should be electric or pedal powered.

First step to fix NC school finance is courage

BOB LUEBKE
CONTRIBUTOR



IN 2022, NORTH CAROLINA spent \$16.7 billion in state, federal, and local funds on its public schools. Those funds were distributed to local schools using 50 different funding formulas.

People frequently focus on how much money was distributed, which is important. Equally important, however, is to evaluate how that money is distributed.

In recent years, reports on how North Carolina funds public schools documented the ways our system of funding schools falls woefully short of incorporating key values, such as accountability, transparency, equity, and efficiency.

In 2009, the North Carolina General Assembly commissioned an evaluation of the state's school finance system. The report found a funding system in need of modernization. Specifically, it "could be modified in a number of ways to improve the equity and efficiency with which state aid is distributed." Solutions ranged from modifications to the allotment system to adoption of a foundation-type formula that would provide floor funding per student with adjustments for student and district characteristics.

While the report received bipartisan support, the recession

at the time tabled any hopes that substantive legislation would be adopted.

A 2016 state report assessing the distribution of state funds to North Carolina public schools concluded that the state's allotment system was "hampered by its complexity; it consists of numerous individual allotments that are redundant, counterintuitive, and in some cases lack a clear rationale. ... Furthermore, allotment policies result in maldistribution of resources across LEAs and charter schools and allotment system features and controls obfuscate transparency and accountability."

In 2017 the General Assembly approved the Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform. The task force was charged to "develop a new funding model for the elementary and secondary public schools of North Carolina based on a weighted student formula." It reviewed the state's current allotment system, reviewed other funding models, and concluded that the state's evaluation of the current funding systems was basically accurate. But it never delivered on its charge.

Those reports didn't paint a pretty picture. They merely confirmed what many educators and policymakers already knew: The system had many problems.

For example, one of the biggest is that the funding system treats school districts inequita-

bly. About two-thirds of all state funding is used to pay personnel. Teacher and staff positions are allocated by student-to-staff ratios, but that's where the similarity ends. Districts are provided money to pay teacher salaries based on the district's average monthly salary plus benefits. But not all teachers are paid the same. Salaries in more affluent areas like Chapel Hill or Wake County will be higher than those in poor areas, often due to differences in longevity, local salary supplements, and local resources.

Differences in pay levels for thousands of staff contribute to funding disparities of millions of dollars between districts, disparities that remain even after adding in supplemental funding to correct the problem. Critics say that such pay disparities ensure that students in poorer districts will get worse or less experienced teachers.

But there are other problems. The system is hyper-focused on inputs, not outputs; it is very complex; and it is expensive to administer. The 2016 report famously said it takes the average school business officer two to three years to understand how schools are financed.

It's a system that lacks transparency. You can readily find school district expenditure data for many categories. However, despite recent changes in federal law, it's nearly impossible to find expenditure data at the

school level.

Yes, our current system of financing schools has problems, but they are not insurmountable. We've known what to do for some time.

In July 2019 my former colleague at the John Locke Foundation, Terry Stoops, and Aaron Smith of the Reason Foundation proposed that North Carolina adopt a common-sense, student-centered funding model based on the principles of fairness, transparency, portability, and autonomy. Under the plan, dollars would be allocated based on a weighted student funding formula and directed to those in need, ensuring that dollars would get to where they were most needed. By equipping principals and local education officials with discretion to align resources with goals, the plan would allow those closest to students to make locally responsible decisions.

Fast forward to April 2023. Responding to previous calls to tie dollars to students, not systems, Sens. Mike Lee, R-New Hanover; Amy Galey, R-Alamance; and Lisa Barnes, R-Nash, introduced legislation to create a new, weighted student funding model and repeal all current funds, grants, and allotments. The scope of the legislation caught many in the education community off guard; however, and the bill never reached the floor for a vote.

For the past two decades researchers have laid out what's wrong with how we finance public schools in North Carolina. While policymakers and the public have quietly ignored it, student-centered funding continues to emerge as the most efficient way to finance our public schools. Such models can address funding disparities by directing more funding to higher-need students, rather than offering more money to districts with more experienced staff. They are also more transparent because they link funding to the needs of students. In addition, student-centered funding serves to strengthen accountability by ensuring that funding gets to where it needs to go.

Rising costs and growing dissatisfaction over educational outcomes make it necessary to improve how we fund public schools in North Carolina. There are better ways to distribute funds efficiently in a system that affirms the values of accountability, efficiency, equity, and transparency. We know student-centered funding addresses many of these concerns. We know how to solve the problem. Having the courage to do so would be a good first step in the right direction.

Bob Luebke is senior fellow for the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation.

Schools are moving to ban smart phones in class. Research suggests it's the right move.

DAVID LARSON
OPINION EDITOR



PSYCHOLOGIST JONATHAN HAIDT'S new book, "The Anxious Generation," lays out the latest research on what constant screen time is doing to America's youth. And the trends are very troubling. Haidt shows how mental

health problems, sleep deprivation, social isolation, suicide attempts, and attention fragmentation have all spiked among youth and suggests a direct link to "screen time," especially smart phones and social media.

He contrasts this "phone-based childhood," and all its difficulties, with a "play-based childhood," where previous generations learned to develop appropriate habits and mindsets, like how to socialize and how to handle loss with resilience. To return to this healthier, more-natural dynamic, Haidt recommends four rules for America's youth:

- **No smart phones until later teen years (use flip phones instead)**
- **No social media until later teen years**
- **More free-play time, where children can learn to interact without constant supervision and intervention from adults**
- **Ban smart-phone use in class**

The other rules also seem wise and necessary to address this issue from a parenting perspective, but the rule regarding smart devices in schools seems to be the one with the biggest relevance to policy. So I'll focus there.

Schools and districts in our

state are signaling their agreement with Haidt's main concerns about smart phone use in schools, as they have independently created a patchwork of policies to address it in recent years.

In the North Carolina School Boards Association's recommended policies, they encourage schools to tightly restrict smart phone use in class. Christine Scheef, the legal counsel and policy director of the NCSBA, told me that while this is their model policy, local districts have wide latitude to apply, customize, or ignore these recommendations.

She said the policy in Onslow County, which a Jacksonville Daily News article says was influenced by the NCSBA language, hews fairly closely to their wording. The article says this policy creates a dynamic where smart devices can be on campus "so long as the devices are not activated, used, displayed or visible during the instructional day or as otherwise directed by school rules or school personnel."

Similar policies to the one adopted by Onslow County have also been adopted by public school districts in nearby coastal counties like Craven, Wayne, Pitt, Pender, and New Hanover.

Craven County's policy this school year is to confiscate phones being used during lessons and to give a three-day sus-

pension to those who continue to violate the rule.

Unsurprisingly, when ABC-12 interviewed parents and students about it, not everybody was happy. Parents worried about not being able to get in touch with their children at a moment's notice, and students felt that it wasn't necessary or fair. The teachers, on the other hand, said that before the policy, many students would just watch movies on their devices during class, ignoring lessons and not interacting with their fellow students.

At the beginning of this school year, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the second largest district in the state, also announced that there would be no cell phone use during class time. Assistant Superintendent David Legrand told WFAE that when students returned to in-person class after the COVID lockdowns, they were using their devices much more than before, including while teachers were giving lessons. He told WFAE that this year they would still be allowed to bring them to school, but they'd have to keep them turned off and out of sight.

Surveying other districts and individual schools across the state, many others, both urban and rural, have moved to restrict smart phone usage in class.

State officials have taken note of the issue too. State Sen. Jim

Burgin, R-Harnett, is a primary sponsor of Senate Bill 485, Study Cell Phone Use in School. Burgin, and his bipartisan sponsors, want the state's Department of Public Instruction to investigate what cell phone policies are in place across the state and what results various strategies see. The bill was sent to the Rules Committee and not taken up during the 2023 long session, but it could be refiled or otherwise revived in a later session.

Burgin's office told me, "Sen. Burgin is passionate about this bill due mostly to the mental health of our young people but also feels that it would improve performance in schools as well."

A study like this was done in England at high schools in their largest cities, and when schools implemented bans on mobile phones, they saw "significant improvement in scores on high-stakes tests." Low-performing students especially benefited, with double the increase in scores as other students. But higher-achieving students also saw a big boost, getting the equivalent of an extra hour of learning per week and evidence of improved focus.

With data like this, England decided to ban smart phones in schools nationwide, a move that was implemented at the begin-

Orr's redistricting lawsuit incorrectly applies Civitas Partisan Index

JIM STIRLING
CONTRIBUTOR



RECENTLY, RETIRED NORTH Carolina Supreme Court justice and 2022 redistricting special master Bob Orr filed a lawsuit challenging the redrawn congressional and state legislative maps based on "fairness." My colleague Dr. Andy Jackson explained how the plaintiffs' central claim in this lawsuit is just another partisan gerrymandering claim presented under a new name. The case will likely rehash the familiar arguments the court heard in the recent partisan gerrymandering case, *Harperv. v. Hall*.

What caught my eye about this lawsuit, however, was the plaintiffs' evidence against the state House and state Senate districts. Instead of hiring their own redistricting experts to analyze districts, plaintiffs used our work — namely, the Civitas Partisan Index (CPI) — as evidence against the new state Senate District 7 (SD 7) and state House District 105 (HD 105).

The CPI is a tool published by the John Locke Foundation to evaluate the partisan lean of North Carolina General Assembly districts. The CPI was highly reliable in reflecting voter behavior in over 94% of races in 2020 and 2022. Nevertheless, the plaintiffs misused the CPI in three ways.

1. Misstating the CPI rating for SD 7

The most obvious error is misreporting the CPI's 2022 rating for SD 7. As part of the lawsuit's factual allegations, the plaintiffs claimed the 2022 CPI rating of the district was a D+8, which they called a "lean Democratic" seat. In reality, SD 7 was rated a D+0 in the 2022 CPI, which means it was considered a toss-up seat. See below.

Not only did the plaintiffs' claims misstate the district's rating, but they didn't even match the scaling system utilized in the CPI. A D+8 district would be considered a likely Democratic seat, not a lean Democratic seat.

2. Ignoring that HD 105 in 2024 has very little overlap with HD 105 in 2022

While plaintiffs accurately quoted the 2022 and 2024 CPI ratings for HD 105, comparing the 2022 and 2024 ratings for the districts that share that name would be misleading. The 2024 version of HD 105 shares only two precincts with its prior iteration. In terms of population, the new HD 105 contains only 11.3% of the people who lived in the HD 105 of 2022.

The current HD 105 pulls most of its population from the 2022 version of HD 103, which the CPI rated a D+2 that year. Comparing these districts simply because they share the same

name would lead to an inaccurate depiction of the effect that redistricting had on a district. Suppose a district was left unmodified between maps but given a different name. You would not then compare it with a prior district that shared that name but not the geography.

3. Failing to account for the year-to-year changes in the CPI

Aside from the specific issues with the House and Senate districts cited in the lawsuit, the plaintiffs failed to account for how we at the John Locke Foundation calculate the CPI. The CPI describes the partisan leaning of a district in comparison with the average partisan leaning of the state. Consequently, it is not a static scale from year to year.

The CPI is adjusted after every election. In the 2024 iteration, we updated the CPI by including the most recent statewide judicial elections. For that reason, the CPI had three variables modified from its 2022 iteration:

1. The average partisan leaning of the state, which changed from 50.76% to 51.36% favoring Republicans
2. The total number of votes from all elections used in the CPI
3. The geographic changes in the districts from redrawing the maps

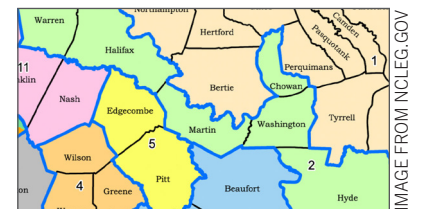
Plaintiffs did not account for the first two variables, focusing solely on the geographic changes from legislators redrawing districts. By ignoring those other variables, however, their use of the CPI creates an apples-to-oranges comparison.

Here is an example showing the importance of statewide partisan lean and total number of votes for a district that wasn't changed geographically. In both iterations of the legislative House maps, HD 22 consisted of Sampson and Bladen counties in their entirety. The district was rated an R+7 in 2022, but it had become an R+8 in 2024.

The plaintiffs' failure to account for all these changes paints an inaccurate picture of how much districts have been altered from redrawing of districts.

While the CPI is an excellent tool for understanding a district's political standing, using it to compare districts from year to year doesn't work. There are more variables in play than simply the shift in district lines.

Jim Stirling is a research fellow at the Civitas Center for Public Integrity at the John Locke Foundation.



Snippet from Orr lawsuit incorrectly listing the CPI rating for SD 7

Civitas Partisan Index, which measures the partisan leaning of state legislative districts.

89. The Civitas Partisan Index for 2022 showed that SD 7 had a partisan lean of "Democratic +8, lean Democratic." After the reapportionment for 2024, the

Civitas Partisan Index has SD 7 with a partisan lean of "Republican +2, lean Republican."

90. The Civitas Partisan Index for 2022 showed that HD 105 had a partisan lean of "Democratic +7, likely Democratic." After the reapportionment for 2024, the Civitas Partisan Index has HD 105 with a partisan lean of "Republican +2, lean Republican."

Post-election round-up of NC's GOP congressional primaries

DALLAS WOODHOUSE
CONTRIBUTOR



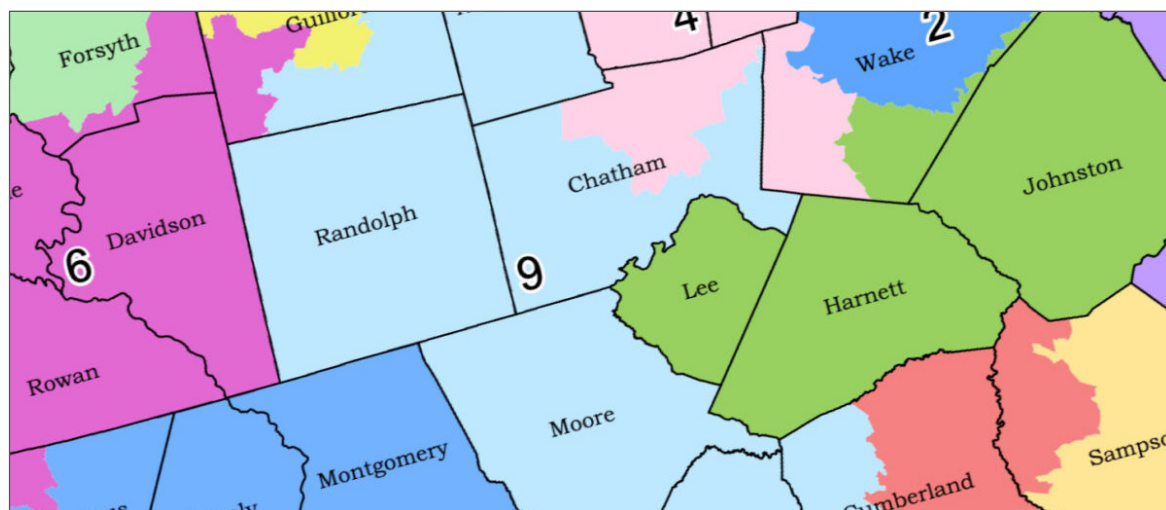
WITH THE PRIMARY elections wrapped up, let's take a look at some of the key GOP primaries for US House.

Current congressional Republicans cruise:

Greg Murphy (NC-3), Virginia Foxx (NC-5), David Rouzer (NC-7), Richard Hudson (NC-9), and Chuck Edwards (NC-11) all faced little or nominal opposition in the primaries and the General Election and are fully expected to return to Congress.

As expected, NC House Speaker Tim Moore (Cleveland), running in, faced little primary opposition and will advance from the NC House to the US House in the fall.

The other GOP congressional primaries were highly contested with the GOP primary winners almost certain to win in November.



First Congressional District

As reported by Carolina Journal, Retired Army Col. Laurie Buckhout bested two-time candidate Sandy Smith in North Carolina's First Congressional District Republican primary election. Buckhout will face Democrat incumbent Don Davis in the

November general election.

"Laurie Buckhout's primary victory puts this race firmly up for grabs for Republicans," said NRCC spokeswoman Delanie Bomar. "Laurie's service as a combat Army colonel and time as a business owner perfectly contrasts self-serving DC Democrat Don Davis, who has burdened North Carolinians with

his disastrous agenda of record-high inflation. Republicans are all-in to flip this seat red in November."

The district, made more competitive in recent redistricting, could be a bellwether for softening support for top-of-the-ticket Democrats, such as President Joe Biden.

Sixth Congressional District

No candidate in the highly competitive Sixth Congressional District GOP primary received over 30%, as Trump-endorsed Addison McDowell received 26%; former Congressman Mark Walker received 24%; 2022's GOP primary winner Christian Castelli received 21%; Trump's endorsed candidate for NC-13 in 2022, Bo Hines, received 14%; and High Point Mayor Jay Wagner received 9%.

The Triad-area district appeared ready to join the others headed to a runoff between the top two vote-getters, McDowell and Walker. But in a surprise development, Walker was offered a position in Trump's presidential campaign and declined a runoff against Trump's endorsed candidate.

McDowell has no serious opposition this fall in this newly drawn GOP district.

The voter ID boogeyman

JEFF MOORE
CJ DEPUTY EDITOR



IT ALL STARTED over a decade ago. The year was 2013, and North Carolina inaugurated its first Republican governor in decades. He would work alongside a majority-Republican state legislature, the first double Republican leadership in over a century, after nearly 150 years of domination by Democrats.

Soon thereafter, reports started to emerge, murmurs that within the new Republican mandate existed a dreadful monster; one with the power to destroy Democracy itself. They were just rumors at first, but then something tangible came to light: real documentation that caused a collective scream from everyone not “on the wrong side of history” — voter ID legislation.

The beast made its way from the legislature, to the desk of Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, where it received a signature before being let loose upon the electorate of North Carolina. It was general pandemonium in those days, for such an insidious monster had rarely threatened the state in such a way. Democrats had deduced that the demon targeted minorities and the poor with “almost surgical precision.”

Something had to be done, and not a moment too soon. So, dragon slayers, like legendary social justice warrior Rev. William Barber, were summoned to take down the monster. In fact, the very day it was released into North Carolina as law, groups like the American Civil Liberties Union lent legal armies to local North Carolina Democrats in hopes of disarming and tying up the boogeyman with lawsuit filings.

It was a fierce battle requiring weekly reinforcements of leftist misfits called into service by Democrats, the guardians of democracy.

It worked! The litigious campaign against the voter ID monster, referred to colloquially as the “Sue til Blue” brigade, or later “The Resistance,” successfully quelled the beast with a carefully placed lawsuit. Then in 2016, after years of nervous persistence, the Fourth US Court of Appeals blocked the horrific law

from going into effect. The 2016 elections in North Carolina were safe! For a time...

Just a couple years later, in 2018, Republicans in the state legislature dared to give the people the keys to the beast’s cage. In an inexplicably reckless move, the Republican General Assembly filed and passed legislation giving the power to decide the fate of the voter ID boogeyman to North Carolina voters, by adding it to the ballot later that year.

That fall, Democrat activists’ greatest fears came true as the voters of North Carolina, obviously blind to the dangers of the wicked vote-suppressor, overwhelmingly approved the release of the monster. It was as if the countless Monday evenings of mob action hadn’t counted for anything. Approved by the people, Republican lawmakers crafted a new, expansive vehicle for voter ID and gave the people every conceivable weapon to defend against its rumored power of suppression.

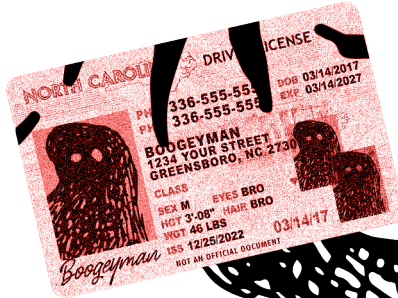
This time, Democrat Gov. Roy Cooper, an experienced partisan litigator, was able to veto the legislation. Only a brief respite was won, though, as Republicans, still on the wrong side of history, swiftly overrode Cooper’s veto and set the boogeyman loose again on North Carolina. If it wasn’t for a renewed crusade of social justice warriors furiously filing a salvo of new lawsuits to again tie up the voter ID colossus, there’s no telling how many votes would have been surgically suppressed.

With the immediate crisis quelled, Democrats and their activist allies turned their attention to making sure the beast could never rise again. They developed new decoy tactics to sneak past the boogeyman-sympathizers (voters) and take control of the NC Supreme Court with their own social justice warriors. Once in control, they hammered a big nail into the boogeyman’s coffin and declared victory, at last!

But just as the issue seemed dead and buried, an unmistakable twitch alluded to a monstrous return. Voters across the state, admittedly safe from the scourge of voter ID, naively rejected their own safety by resoundingly rejecting Democrat judges and electing a con-

servative majority to the NC Supreme Court. The unthinkable then came to pass: the voter ID boogeyman was resurrected, given sanction, and released again.

Its first contact? Massive 2023 municipal elections in huge population centers like Mecklenburg County, where Democrats warned that heaps of vulnerable populations were defenseless against the



disenfranchisement wielded by voter ID.

They never saw it coming. In the aftermath of the 2023 municipal elections, the first real run in with the voter ID boogeyman after years of crippling fear, leftist poll watchers, reporters, and politicians could not believe their own eyes. What they saw was something they’d never imagined.

When they went to survey the damage, the carnage, the suppression; they saw... *NOTHING*.

That’s because the voter ID boogeyman isn’t real. It never was. Last fall, voter ID requirements were in place for dozens of municipal elections across the state. By all credible accounts, there was nothing out of order. Nothing out of place. No disenfranchisement, no voter suppression. In fact, many county election directors asserted they had no reports of anyone coming to the polls without an ID. It turns out that almost everyone has an ID, and those that don’t are easily afforded one by Republicans’ expansive legislation, or they can merely cast a provisional ballot to be verified later.

In early voting for 2024 primaries, with voter photo ID required, things progressed without issue.

Actually, had North Carolinians been released earlier from the grips of Democrats’ fear-mongering narratives, they’d have realized long ago that dozens of states (even blue states)

require some form of voter ID. More enlightening still, is that evidence suggests voter ID laws don’t suppress anyone’s vote. No significant change in voter turnout occurs, even among those whom Democrats insisted were incapable of defending against a voter ID requirement.

Another state subject to the left’s

scare tactics on voter ID, Georgia, faced a very high profile test as recently as 2022. The result? Turnout was very high. Higher than expected. High enough to almost undercut the boogeyman narrative the left has committed itself to in regards to voter ID. *Almost*. An Associated Press headline following that election hints at the powerful commitment to make-believe: “Effect of Georgia’s voting law unclear, despite high turnout.”

North Carolina will follow the same reality-based path this presidential election year. Despite a decade of delusional premonitions of the voter ID boogeyman suppressing voters, voters of all kinds will now be required to show photo identification, and voters of all kinds will easily meet this requirement.

Then, once the election comes and goes without a catastrophic blow dealt to “Democracy itself,” voters can sleep at night, totally unafraid of the voter ID boogeyman.

Post-primary round-up

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Eighth Congressional District

In a stunning political comeback of the ages, Pastor Mark Harris will head to Congress from the ruby-red Eighth Congressional District.

Harris was the nominee for a different version of the district in 2018. Harris’ narrow 2018 victory was overturned after allegations of ballot har-

vesting in Bladen County. Mecklenburg state Rep. John Bradford, who invested significant personal resources advocating for his candidacy and attacking Harris, could not keep Harris under the 30% threshold to force a runoff. Harris won 30.44% of the primary vote, meaning he won the race by less than 150 votes.

Supporters of Union County’s Allen Baucom blistered Bradford for running for Congress from a district other than his own. Baucom took 27% of the vote to Bradford’s 17%.

Harris had an underfunded campaign and was not able to answer many of the attacks against him. However, he start-

ed with significantly higher name ID, and the other candidates failed to raise their profiles enough before attacking Harris to overtake him, in this photo-finish race.

10th Congressional District

In NC-10, a war veteran will replace retiring GOP US Rep. Patrick McHenry.

Boosted by Americans for Prosperity, Afghanistan war veteran Pat Harrigan upset state Rep. Grey Mills and several other candidates, winning 41% of the vote to Mills 39%. AFP knocked on thousands of doors for Harrigan, who won ev-

ery county in the district except Mills’ home of Iredell.

13th Congressional District

District 13 was North Carolina’s wildest congressional race this year, with 14 Republicans on the ballot.

The deep-red district’s largest counties are Johnston and parts of Wake. The district includes all or parts of Harnett, Lee, Franklin, Granville, Person, and Caswell counties.

Johnston County’s Kelly Daughtry will face Wake County’s Brad Knott in a May runoff. If Daughtry can consolidate the Johnston County vote, the dis-

trict’s largest pool of GOP primary voters, this race could be hers for the taking. Both campaigns will be well funded, and outside groups could play a role here.

Dallas Woodhouse is the NC executive director for American Majority.



Public safety top concern as most NC homicides now go unsolved

JON GUZE
CONTRIBUTOR



A RECENT CIVITAS POLL (now called the CJ poll) found that almost two-thirds of North Carolinians are either very concerned or somewhat concerned about crime and safety in their communities.

They are right to be concerned. Crime rates in North Carolina have increased dramatically in recent years, with homicide leading the way. Between 2013 and 2019 the mur-

der rate hovered at around 6.0 per 100,000. In 2020, however, it jumped to 8.2, and it jumped again in 2021 to 9.6, which is more than 50% higher than the pre-2020 average. Crime rates fell somewhat in 2022, but the murder rate in 2022 was still 24% higher than it was in 2019.

The rates for other kinds of crimes, including other kinds of violent crimes, also jumped in 2020 and 2021. The rate of aggravated assault, for example, increased by 15% over the course of those two years.

As noted above, crime rates abated somewhat in 2022, and

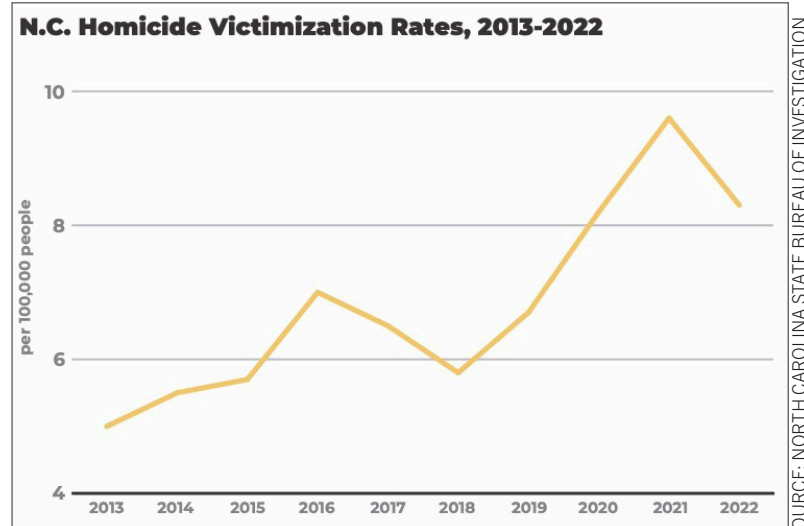
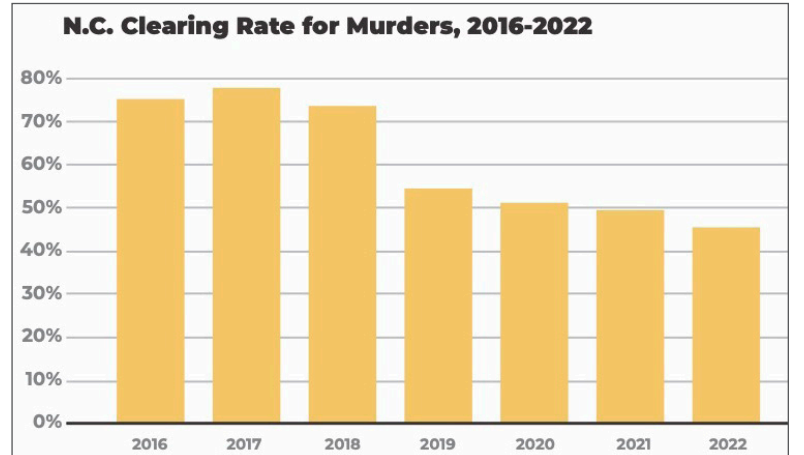
we must hope and pray that that decline continues. Absent systemic changes in the operation of the criminal justice system, however, a sustained decline seems unlikely. Research has repeatedly shown that the best way to deter crime is to increase the likelihood of arrest and punishment. Unfortunately, arrest and punishment have become markedly less likely in recent years.

In 2017, when the murder rate was 6.5 per 100,000, almost 80% of all murders ended with a perpetrator being charged. That is known as the “clearance rate,” and, unfortunately, that rate has declined every year since then. In 2021, when the murder rate peaked at 9.6 per 100,000, fewer than 50% of all murder cases were cleared, and the clearance rate declined still further in 2022 to just 45%.

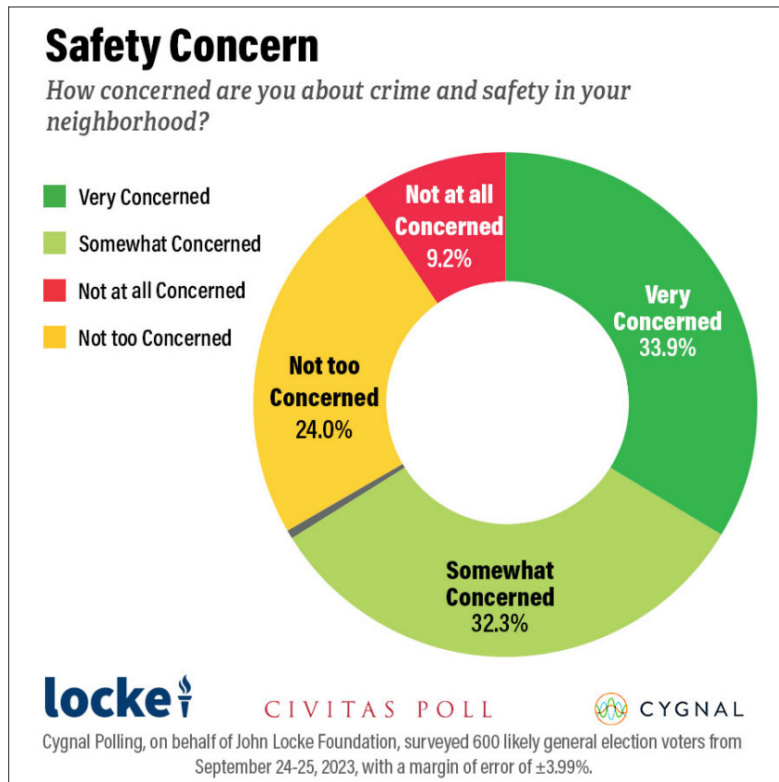
The clearance rates for other crimes declined just as precipitously over the period. For example, about 50% of all aggravated assaults were cleared in 2017. By 2022 the clearance rate for aggravated assault had declined to just over 25%.

What all this means is that more than half of all murderers and almost three-quarters of those who have committed aggravated assault are getting away with their crimes nowadays. Those who have committed less heinous crimes are even more likely to go unpunished. That is not the way to deter crime.

Despite the recent decline, crime rates in North Carolina are still higher than they were before 2020. They are also higher than the national average, and the disparity between us and the rest of the country has been growing.



SOURCE: NORTH CAROLINA STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



Our murder rate was about 20% higher than the national average in 2019, which wasn't good, but it was more than 40% higher in 2021, which is very bad indeed.

It would be great if North Carolina could get its crime levels down to pre-2020 levels, and it would be even better if we could get them down below the national average. Even if we succeeded in doing those things, however, many North

Carolinians will still have good reason to be concerned about crime. Crime rates vary from year to year and from state to state, but they vary much more from neighborhood to neighborhood. Residents of high-crime communities will always need to worry about crime.

Jon Guze is director of legal studies at the John Locke Foundation.

Climate collusion

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Cooper's goal is to have 1.25 million electric vehicles registered in North Carolina by 2030. Considering the state has only about 81,000 now, according to the most recent NCDOT data, local dealers would have to sell roughly 167,000 annually to hit Cooper's goal. Fortunately, consumers will get the last word.

It's important to note that

Cooper's plan to electrify the state's transportation sector hasn't gone through the General Assembly, where North Carolinians could have an open debate via elected representatives about the effectiveness and cost of such a sweeping program.

Elite climate funders like Tom Steyer, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and Michael Bloomberg disregard the messiness of the democratic process. Instead, they buy government staff positions. They are good with banning our gas stoves, SUVs, and freedom to travel, but not their own. Roy Cooper is a philosoph-

ical ally, denying voters the right to know and decide if they trust privately funded staff positions influencing his decisions.

The elite climate-activist influence-buying issue needs a dose of sunshine, as do Cooper's related executive orders. Voters deserve to know who influences decisions that impact every aspect of their lives.

Amy O. Cooke is the retired chief executive officer of the John Locke Foundation and publisher of Carolina Journal and founder of the public policy consulting firm East x West Strategies.

Smart phones in schools

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ning of this school year. France and the Netherlands have also passed similar bans.

North Carolina has a lot more local control on education, so a statewide mandate like what England did is unlikely. But if “best practices” emerge that see smart phone use as unwelcome in class, it appears that would be a positive outcome for student men-

tal health, test scores, and behavior.

Parents should also take into consideration Haidt's recommendations on smart phone use in general. It could be that giving your child a smart phone with unlimited access to social media, video games, and other addictive apps is doing them much more harm than good. Even if parents do not heed these warnings, many students across the state are now at least getting a break from their screen-based world during class.

Short and sweet

continued from PAGE 2

of these sessions, and the “short session” length has generally been on the longer side in recent years.

While the 2022 session adjourned on July 1, it appears more of an exception in the recent history of “short sessions” rather than the norm. The 2020

session adjourned on Sept. 2, two months and three days after the end of the fiscal year. In 2018, the General Assembly did not adjourn “short session” until Dec. 27 and had three additional special sessions interspersed. In 2016, the General Assembly adjourned at a reasonable date of July 1 but then had five extra sessions, the last of which adjourned on Dec. 21. In 2014, the “short session” adjourned one month and three days after the end of the fiscal year, on Aug. 2.

Traditionally, those on the center-right of American politics

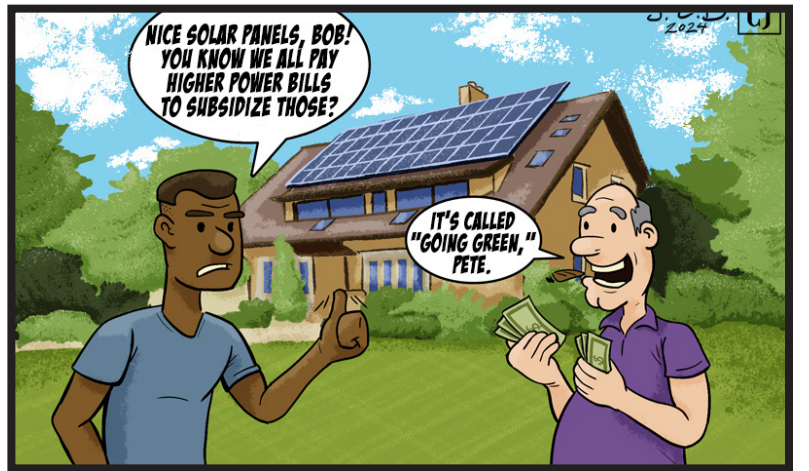
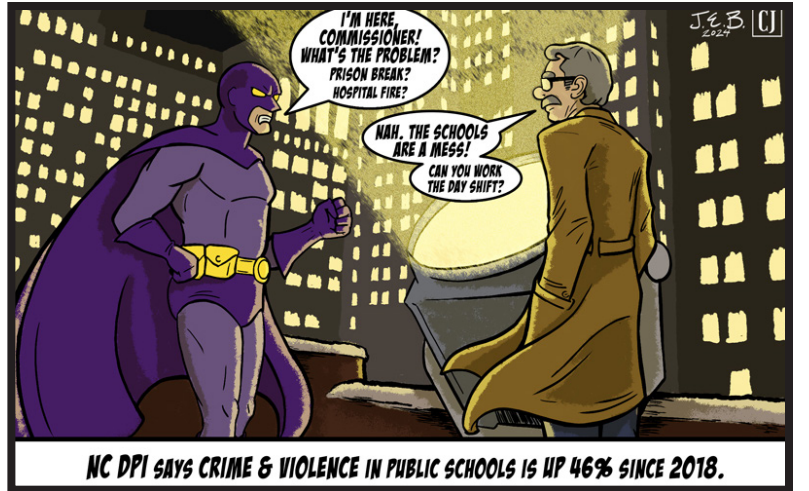
— conservatives, classical liberals, and libertarians — tend to distrust situations that lead to government overreach and expansion. Therefore, if there's a conservative majority in the General Assembly, there should be a push for a brief legislative “short session.”

Conservatives emphasize fiscal responsibility and limited government intervention. A shorter session restricts lawmakers' time to propose and pass new legislation, curbing the potential for overreach and excessive spending. Prolonged ses-

sions are unnecessary opportunities for creating increased regulatory burdens and unnecessary bureaucracy, contrary to conservative government efficiency goals. A brief “short session” would allow legislators to focus on critical conservative priorities like fiscal discipline, tax relief, and safeguarding individual freedoms without succumbing to overreach. Therefore, keeping the session brief ensures that legislative actions align with small government principles.

By the time the General As-

sembly convenes on April 10, the state budget — the real focus of the session — will have only been in place for six months since it became law on Oct. 3, 2023. Interim committees have helped legislators narrow down their priorities, and many would like to return to their districts quickly to work at their real jobs (we have a part-time legislature) and campaign for re-election. My advice to them is to keep the “short session” short and avoid the shenanigans and bad press of spending months in Raleigh needlessly.



THE CAROLINA JOURNAL

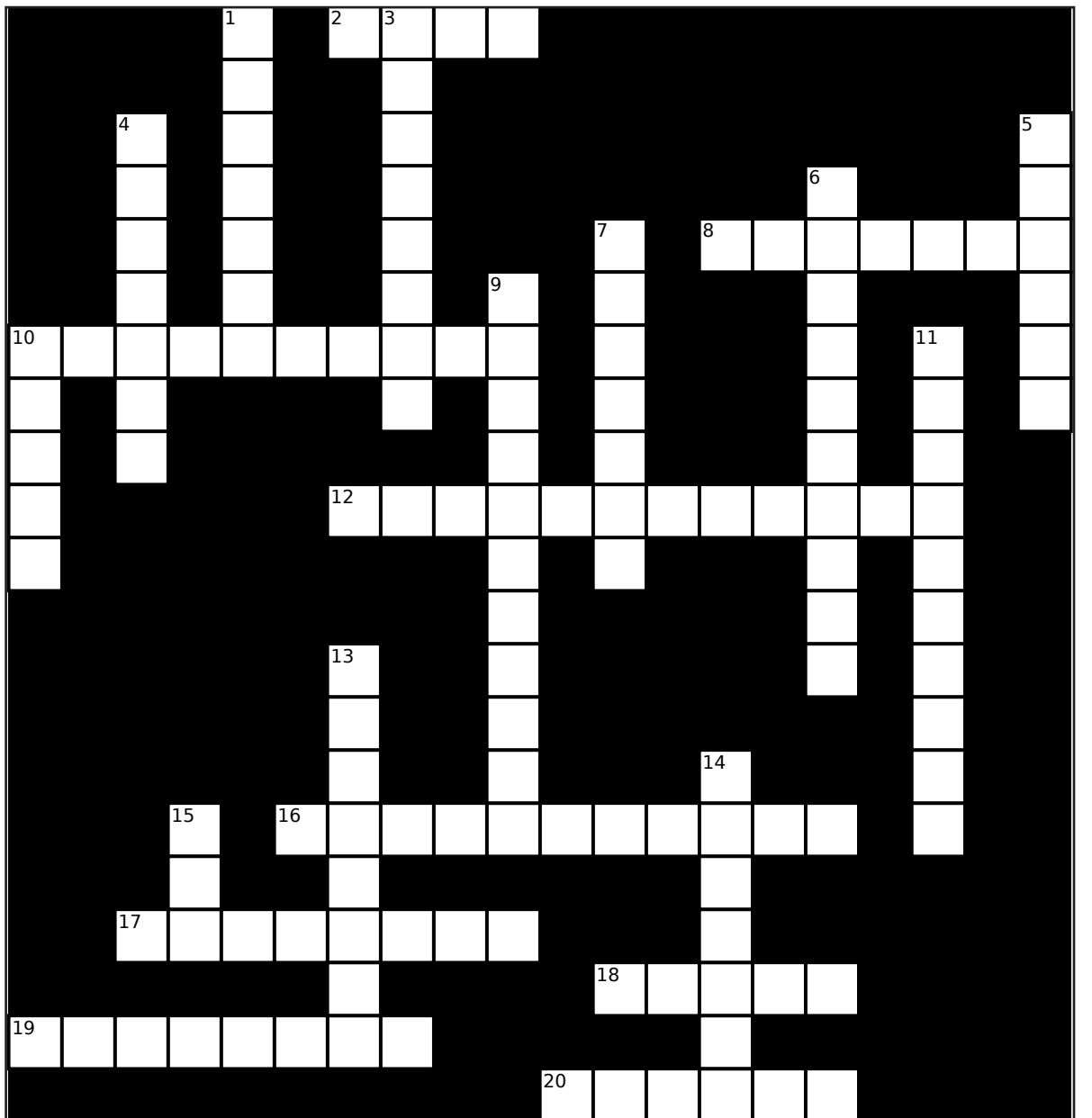
Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

- 2 Act allotting two-year window for child sexual abuse claims in schools
- 8 Policy consolidating welfare-program access
- 10 Schools are looking to ban what device in classrooms
- 12 Private-public partnership wanting to accelerate innovation within NC universities
- 16 Top issue for voters heading into the 2024 election
- 17 Gubernatorial front-runner according to recent CJ polls
- 18 NC is entering what type of legislative session
- 19 Potential contributing factor to high inbound migration
- 20 State commissioner of insurance

DOWN

- 1 Sports bet where you wager on individual performance of collegiate athletes
- 3 Planned Parenthood v. Stein involves what controversial topic
- 4 Act ending race-based mandates in medical school
- 5 NC labor commissioner front-runner according to recent CJ polls
- 6 Top law school professors do not donate to candidates of which party
- 7 School board member suing town of Smithfield
- 9 NC voting law being challenged in federal court later in April
- 10 Jon Hardister's current term number
- 11 House committee debating raising pay for what school position
- 13 County under fire from NAACP for Confederate monument
- 14 New chair of the NC Republican Party
- 15 Number of times the Biden-Harris administration has visited NC this year



Across: 2 Safe 8 One Door 10 Smart phone 12 NC Innovation 16 Immigration 17 Robinson
 18 Short 19 Tax rates 20 Causey
 Down: 1 Prop bet 3 Abortion 4 Educate 5 Farley 6 Republican 7 Johnson 9 Felon voting 10
 Sixth 11 Principals 13 Alamance 14 Simmons 15 Two